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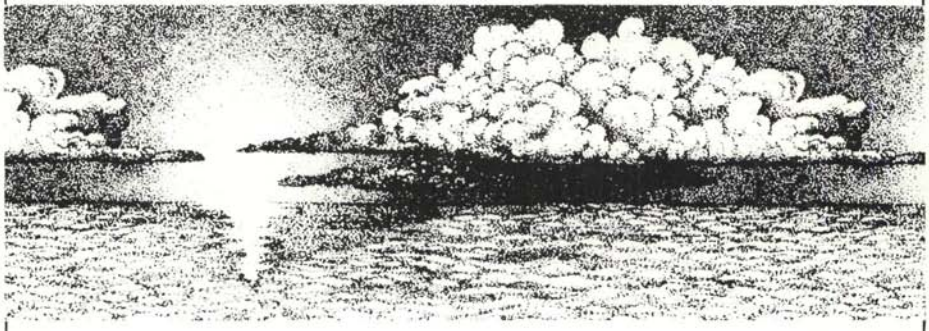

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CONTENTS


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **NOTES** | | **8** |
| **HANNAH ARENDT AND LIONEL TRILLING** | | |
| **William Phillips** | | **9** |
| **Hans Jonas** | | **12** |
| **Frank Kermode** | | **14** |
| **ARTICLES** | | |
| **Adrienne Rich** | *The Kingdom of the Fathers* | **17** |
| **Robert Lekachman** | *Capitalism: The End of the Journey* | **68** |
| **Lewis Coser** | *A View From England* | **76** |
| **Ronald Sukenick** | *Thirteen Digressions* | **90** |
| **Rosalind Krauss** | *Impressionism* | **102** |
| **STORIES** | | |
| **Harold Brodkey** | *The Pain Continuum* | **38** |
| **Christina Stead** | *Uncle Morgan at the Nats* | **60** |
| **POEMS** | | |
| **Steve Jamison** | *That's It, Coaltown* | **82** |
| **Shirley Williams** | *Miss Abinetha* | **84** |
| **David Petruzelli** | *The Horn of the Paperweight Conch* | **86** |
| **Luis Salinas** | *I Salute the Dead* | **87** |
| | *Olivia* | **88** |
| **M. Slotznick** | *October. Turning* | **89** |
| **GOING TO THE MOVIES** | | |
| **David Denby** | *The Two Godfathers* | **113** |


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**BOOKS**


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Gilbert Sorrentino** | *A Month of Sundays,*<br>by John Updike | **119** |
| **Leonard Kriegel** | *The Life of Emily Dickinson,*<br>by Richard B. Sewall | **122** |
| | *Faulkner,*<br>by Joseph Blotner | |
| | *Lincoln Steffens,*<br>by Justin Kaplan | |
| | *The Born Exile,*<br>by Gillian Tindall | |
| | *Arnold Bennett,*<br>by Margaret Drabble | |
| **Neil Schmitz** | *The Letters of Henry James,*<br>edited by Leon Edel | **130** |
| **Denis Donoghue** | *Three On the Tower,*<br>by Louis Simpson | **135** |
| **Vincent Crapanzano** | *The Invention of Culture,*<br>by Roy Wagner | **139** |
| **WRITERS' CHOICE**<br>**Gilbert Sorrentino,**<br>**Robert Coles,**<br>**Steven Simmons** | | **145** |
| **LETTERS** | | **147** |


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TURN TO PAGE 149

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# NOTES

**ADRIENNE RICH** lives in Manhattan and teaches at Douglass College. Her book on motherhood, *Of Woman Born*, will be published by Norton in October. . . . "The Pain Continuum" is part of **HAROLD BRODKEY**'s novel in progress which will be published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. . . . **CHRISTINA STEAD**'s newest book, *Miss Herbert*, will be published this spring by Random House. . . . "An unfriendly, though I hope not unamusing, assessment of the current state of economics," is **ROBERT LEKACHMAN**'s description of his latest book, *Economists at Bay*, which will be published by McGraw-Hill this March. Mr. Lekachman is Distinguished Professor of Economics at Herbert H. Lehman College. . . . **LEWIS COSER** is spending this year as a fellow of Clare Hall, Cambridge. His latest book is *Greedy Organization*. . . . **STEVE JAMISON** attended Stanford University and Fresno State and worked for eight years as a bellhop and later as an assistant manager of a lodge in Big Sur State Park. . . . *Give Birth to Brightness* is the title of **SHIRLEY WILLIAMS**'s study of Afro-American literature, a subject she currently teaches at the University of California at San Diego. Ms. Williams has also published a book of poetry, *The Peacock Poems*. . . . **DAVID PETRUZELLI** lives in New Jersey and makes his living as a typesetter though, he writes, he would "rather be teaching a poetry workshop". . . . Author of *Crazy Gypsy*, and coeditor of an anthology of Chicano writing, **LUIS SALINAS** lives in California. . . . **M. SLOTZNICK** graduated from Princeton, works in the construction industry and lives in Philadelphia. . . . Currently director of the writing program at the University of Colorado, **RONALD SUKENICK** has published several books with the Fiction Collective. . . . **ROSALIND KRAUSS** is a cofounder of *October*, a new critical review that will consider the spectrum of visual and temporal arts from painting and sculpture through film to dance, theater, and performance. . . . Currently at work in Dublin on a film adaptation of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* **DAVID DENBY** writes frequently on film. . . . **GILBERT SORRENTINO** teaches at The New School for Social Research. . . . *Notes for the Two-Dollar Window,* **LEONARD KRIEGEL**'s latest book, has just been published by E.P. Dutton. . . . **NEIL SCHMITZ** is currently at work on a book on Walt Whitman. . . . *Thieves of Fire*, a study of the Promethean imagination, is **DENIS DONOGHUE**'s most recent book. He is Professor of Modern English and American Literature at University College, Dublin. . . . **VINCENT CRAPANZANO** teaches Comparative Literature at Queens College. He hopes to return to work soon on his biography of a Moroccan who is married to a she-demon.

**The poems for this issue were chosen by Philip Levine.**

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# HANNAH ARENDT AND LIONEL TRILLING

In the last few months, two friends died. They had very little in common, except that they belonged to that small community of New York writers and intellectuals that has had so much influence on the writing and thinking of the country, but has lately been decimated by death and broken up by political and literary disagreements. They had many failings, but together they made up a brilliant and sophisticated group, comparable to those gatherings of talent that came on the scene from time to time in Europe and in this country and changed the face of culture.

One was American, very much in the Anglo-American literary tradition; the other was European, very much in the cosmopolitan European cultural tradition. But it was in the nature of this intellectual community, originally in New York, later dispersed through the country, that it brought together the best of the native and the émigré minds, with both gaining by the cross-fertilization.

This period has not yet been fully written about, and though a few moving recollections have appeared, we have to rely on our memories, which naturally reflect our own personalities. Part of the difficulty is that those who have not lived through the times tend to miss the tone of ideas and events, while those who have find it difficult to objectify them. In addition, most of our relations and friendships were a combination of the personal and the professional, and each of these kept impinging on the other.

I first met Lionel Trilling in the late thirties. Several of us—I forget who, though I think Fred Dupee was there—had lunch to discuss writing for PR. Lionel looked very much then the way he did shortly before he died. He was jaunty, classically handsome, with soft but defined features, and modest but assured, in the way only someone who sensed his own gifts could be, as distinct from the overconfidence or underconfidence of those who do not know their own minds. I don't recall what we talked about; all I remember is that Lionel struck me from the beginning as a man of sensibility, a man who was interested in ideas but who soaked them up as he did feelings

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and impressions. And this, of course, was the dominant tone of his thinking all through his life. Like all of us, he went through many phases in his beliefs, but always his beliefs were merged with his sensibility, so that they appeared as intellectual moods. In this respect, Lionel was almost a prototype of what has become known as the literary mind, and though he had very positive political opinions, they were usually subordinated to his sense of style and quality. This was one of the reasons, I believe, why he was able to remain friendly with people of divergent views, and, in turn, was liked and admired by many who disagreed strongly with the tenor of his thinking.

Lionel's person was very much like his writing: orderly, gracious, flexible, modulated, appearing to be constantly in control. Though he was set in many of his attitudes and prejudices, he was never niggardly, usually generous toward those whose views he opposed, particularly to students and young people, generally. But it would serve no personal or historical purpose to deny that we disagreed frequently, sometimes strongly, in literary and political matters. Even though he was often attracted to extreme ideas, particularly to extreme personalities, Lionel was nevertheless wary of writing or of life-styles that pushed toward the edge of experience. But obviously, things we had in common were more important than those that divided us, and we remained friends to the end, not only out of liking and respect for each other, but also out of respect for the idea of friendship, which often could not survive the violent political arguments of the time, or the rampant professional and personal competitiveness. It must be said that it has not been a period in which friendship has been held in the highest esteem; it could be sustained only by those who felt that friendship was not a synonym for agreement.

I first met Hannah Arendt sometime in the forties. She had recently arrived in this country from France, having kept one step ahead of the Nazis, and was working, as I recall, for Schocken Books. In fact, I think I first saw her at a party given by Schocken. She had difficulties with the language, and was seemingly trying to make sense out of America and out of its literary intellectuals. But one was immediately struck by her alertness, by that kind of concentrated alertness, as though she were actually able to penetrate ideas simply by looking through them, that one associated later with the remarkable power and originality of her mind. I also remember being impressed by the unusual combination of gentleness and force, which perhaps was her most distinguishing trait to the end of her life. It was a very strange and seductive combination: firmness of tone and strength of conviction with a soft, almost caressing manner. Even at her most insistent, when she was rejecting an idea or a person, her eyes seemed to be smiling benignly.

Hannah had in its highest form what I've always taken to be the su-

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preme quality of intelligence, that instantaneous ability to cut through the nonsense surrounding most ideas and situations and to see them in a fresh way. Occasionally, this led to quirkiness or one-sidedness, as those with more positivist or Marxist leanings have been quick to point out. But this is the price one often has to pay for originality. And it seems to me ungenerous to emphasize whatever shortcomings she might have had at a time when so few figures come near the range and depth of her thinking.

In her personal habits, Hannah could be described as old-fashioned, without any of those affectations of style cultivated these days by successful intellectuals. Even her apartment looked quaintly European, like that of someone who had not acquired the new American ways of living. She lived quietly and modestly, and did not go in for flashy and fashionable forms of experience or amusement. She even believed in friendship and loyalty—loyalty to a community as well as to people. The last time I saw Hannah was at Lionel's funeral services. She did not say much, but her hurt and resigned look was a comment on the sadness of the occasion.

One can only hope that as a generation goes, its values will not also go.

**W.P.**

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# HANNAH ARENDT

*Words spoken at the funeral service for Hannah Arendt at the Riverside Memorial Chapel in New York City on Monday, December 8, 1975*

It is difficult to picture, for the remainder of my days, a world without Hannah Arendt. Her presence in it made a difference which one experienced ever anew; her going is a shattering blow, and with her genius for friendship there are many who feel infinitely poorer now in their personal lives. I was her friend for over fifty years—ever since she appeared, in 1924, eighteen years old, a first-semester student of philosophy, among the many young who then flocked to Marburg from all over Germany, drawn by the magnet of Martin Heidegger. How I remember this singular newcomer! Shy and withdrawn, with striking, beautiful features and lonely eyes, she stood immediately out as "exceptional," as "unique" in an as yet indefinable way. Brightness of intellect was no rare article there. But here was an intensity, an inner direction, an instinct for quality, a groping for essence, a probing for depth, which cast a magic about her. One felt an absolute determination to be herself, with the toughness to carry it through in the face of great vulnerability. Her teachers felt it too: first Heidegger, later Karl Jaspers became from teachers lifelong friends.

In those early years of my knowing her, she was, as so many young philosophers in Germany, completely apolitical—the higher life of the mind disdaining the vulgarity of the political arena. This changed with the rise of Nazism. Persecution aroused her; not just her own and that of her people, but that of others too, of the left, of anybody. Moral indignation armed her, extreme distress called her into the active life. To everybody's surprise, she showed eminent practical sense, equal to every situation of that disjointed time; and she was as fearless in person as she later always was in thought.

It must have been during those émigrée years in Paris, ending with the fall of France, that her theoretical interest too took its political turn. Still, what would have become of that, had she not come to these shores—who knows? It was the experience of the Republic here which decisively shaped her political thinking, tempered as it was in the fires of European tyranny

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and catastrophe, and forever supported by her grounding in classical thought. America taught her a way beyond the hardened alternatives of left and right from which she had escaped; and the idea of the Republic, as the realistic chance for freedom, remained dear to her even in its darkening days.

No immigrant has better repaid her debt. Here is not the place to evaluate Hannah Arendt's work. But this much I can say: From "The Origins of Totalitarianism" on, with which she broke upon the literary scene, she has forced up the level of discourse in political theory and imposed her standards of conceptualization on the intellectual community. Even disagreement, contradiction itself, must follow her to the heights she has set and must meet her there. And these heights are sustained by depth—that depth of human insight and feeling which gave substance to everything she said and saved it from mere brilliance. She did not strive for originality; she just was original. Things looked different after she had looked at them. Thinking was her passion, and thinking with her was a moral activity. She was intensely moral, but completely unmoralistic. Whatever she had to say was important, often provocative, sometimes wrong, but never trivial; never negligible, never to be forgotten again. Even her errors were more worthwhile than the verities of many lesser minds. She liked, of course, to be right, and on occasion could be quite formidably contentious; but she did not believe, as she confided to me, that "truth" is to be had for us these days. She believed, instead, in the incessant, always temporary trying for that face of it which the present condition happens to turn toward us. Thinking it through is its own reward, for we will be more understanding after than we were before. We will have more light, and still not have "the truth." But when every proposition is melted down again in the further process of thought, there still remains this: she has set a style of inquiry and debate which will ensure that no cheap formula for the human predicament will pass muster, so long as her example is remembered.

But as she herself cherished friendship above all, let me end by speaking of her as a friend. Last year, Hannah, we celebrated our fifty years, reminiscing on how it began, in Bultmann's New Testament seminar where we two were the only Jews; how it grew through the years, weathering long separations in space and stormy clashes of opinion—always sure in the one shared feeling of what matters and what not, what truly counts, what to honor and what to despise. There are so many here who can sing your praises as a friend—who can testify that any personal bond you once entered in earnest was for life. You kept faith, you were always there. We all are the poorer without you. The world has become colder without your warmth. You left us too early. We shall try to keep faith with you.

**Hans Jonas**

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## LIONEL TRILLING

I have sometimes noted a fugitive resemblance between the literary world of New York and time as it is characterized by Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida.*

> For Time is like a fashionable host
> That slightly shakes the parting guest by the hand,
> And with his arms outstretched as he would fly
> Grasps in the comer. The welcome ever smiles,
> And farewell goes out sighing.

A few years back, talking to a fashionable New York host about changing allegiances, I suggested that Trilling must always retain a specially honored place in that society. "Well," said the fashionable host, "Lionel's a lovely fellow. But there are lots of lovely fellows."

But there are not lots of lovely fellows. Perhaps this will now be better understood. The fashionable hosts were always professing surprise that English intellectuals tended to see Trilling as New York's most valuable possession, that they seemed envious. The reason was that the English had had no one even faintly comparable, at any rate not since Orwell died, and his style was so different that the comparison means very little.

I have elsewhere written, with sadness and admiration, of a writer and teacher who came as close to greatness as his profession, in these times, permit. In doing so I put out of my head all images of Trilling as a friend. But the images that have recurred so often since then are not directly related to his writing, having more in common with that gentle little epiphany with which Jack Thompson ended his *New York Review* obituary: Trilling skillful, meditative, up to his waist in water and playing a fish. But in my images there is always a place for Diana.

Diana, Lionel and I drove one day to Eastwood in Nottinghamshire to visit D.H. Lawrence's house. Afterwards we set out on foot to look for "Mir-

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iam's'' farm, asking the way of a very old man. He was a retired miner in his mid-eighties, exactly as old as Lawrence would have been had he lived. He showed us the farm, hidden behind a clump of trees; and he told us about its occupants in the years since the Chambers family left it. They did not allow visits. He talked about the mines and pointed out the ruins of an old mine on a hilltop. In his day it had often caused floods in the later and deeper shafts, and once—he described the occasion very vividly—he himself had to swim for his life. Then he told us how, as a boy, he had come upon a vast fossil fish in the coalface. He specified the geological period. I watched Lionel watching him, that somehow priestly face—capable of registering ironies fit for an Enlightenment *abbé*—now totally receptive. That a collier, speaking in the unaffected accent of Lawrence's generation and his countryside, should tell his story with such natural ease, in sentences well-formed beyond the highest aspirations of his grandchildren, was memorable. I remember not the words but the listening face. Later that day we drove into Newstead Abbey, where hundreds were paying desultory homage to Byron. Seeing the crowd we decided not to stop, and drove on past a sign forbidding access, jeered and gestured at by the law-abiding visitors. But the road ended, to our surprise, in a desolate colliery yard; and we had to turn round and run the gauntlet again and to the same accompaniment, which the Trillings received with absolute seigneurial calm.

Another image: Palermo, a nasty dark hotel, damp and chilly Christmas weather in the streets. We were astonished to receive an invitation to a Christmas Eve party at the house of a tourist guide. It turned out to be sedately but decidedly festive. We pooled all our remembered bits of Dante. Then our host explained that it was the local custom to play a certain game, the rules of which he then expounded. It all seemed impossibly difficult, but we said we should have to learn as we played. The game turned out to be bingo. The family was large and had beautiful manners; by an act of deference that seemed the most natural thing in the world Lionel was installed in the patriarchal chair at the head of the table. He sat drinking fizzy wine and looking every inch the right man for the part and the occasion, courtly, amused, generous. Diana meanwhile won game after game. The Sicilians knew we were professors, but to them that meant merely that we taught in school, and they spoke accordingly. Lionel found this pleasing and accurate, and in the years that followed continued to exchange Christmas greetings with these kind people whom none of us will ever see again. It was a good evening, and everything he did showed how he valued civility.

One last trivial image of that untrivial face—again in Palermo, at the Opera House, where they were performing Auber's preposterous opera *La*

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*Muette de Portici.* It has two claims to fame: once it started or aided a revolution in, I think, Brussels; and it is the only opera in which the prima donna is a deaf mute. Lionel wore an expression of ancient resignation, saying nothing; but he accepted with alacrity the proposal that we should leave at the end of the second Act. There was often this grim gaiety in him, as also when he dealt with the cabdrivers of Palermo, who refused to let one see the meter (they hung their caps over it) and lamented their unique poverty, their hordes of starving children. He was generous, patient and wise. I wish there were more such lovely fellows.

**Frank Kermode**

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**Adrienne Rich**

# THE KINGDOM OF THE FATHERS

For the first time in history, a pervasive recognition is developing that the patriarchal system cannot answer for itself; that it is not inevitable; that male fear and animosity towards women can no longer be either denied or defended. And when we acknowledge this, we tear open the relationship at the core of all relationships, in its tangle of lust, domination, violence, possession, fear, divisions of labor, sexual longing, sexual hatred, and the sexual understructure of social and political forms. For the first time in history we are in a position to turn and look at the country of the fathers and see it for what it is and has been. What we see is the one system which recorded civilization has never actively challenged and which has been so universal as to appear a law of nature.

Patriarchy is the power of the fathers: a familial, social, political system in which men—by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor—determine what part women shall or shall not play and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male. It does not necessarily imply that no woman has power or that all women in a given culture may not have certain powers. Among the matrilineal Crow, for example, women take major honorific roles in ceremony and festival, but are debarred from social contacts and sacred objects during menstruation. Moreover, where women and men alike share a particular cultural phenomenon, it implies quite different things according to gender. As Hannah Papanek has noted, "Where men wear veils—as among the North African Tuareg—this remoteness serves to increase the status and power of an individual,

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but it hardly does so for women in purdah." "Ultimately the line is drawn," as it is drawn, albeit differently, in every culture.

Nor does patriarchy imply a direct survival of the father's power over the son, although this power relationship was once culturally unquestioned, as for example under feudalism, or in the Victorian family. The German psychoanalyst Alexander Mitscherlich traces the decline of this father-son relationship under the pressures of industrialization, mass production, and the specialization of labor: as "work" moves outside the home and society becomes more complex and fragmented, the father becomes a figure largely absent from the family, one who has lost the "substance" of his old practical authority. Yet, as Mitscherlich points out, "the patriarchal structural components in our society are closely associated with magical thought. It assumes the omnipotence-impotence relationship between father and son, God and man, ruler and ruled, to be the natural principle of social organization." This omnipotence-impotence relationship exists above all between men and women; and education, social organization, and our own "magical thought" still bear the imprint of that paternalistic image.

The power of the fathers has been difficult to grasp because it saturates everything, even the language in which we try to describe it. It is diffuse and concrete, symbolic and literal, universal and expressed with local variations which may obscure its universality. Under patriarchy, I may live in *purdah* or drive a truck; I may raise my children on a *kibbutz* or be the sole breadwinner for a fatherless family or participate in a demonstration against abortion legislation with my baby on my back; I may work as a "barefoot doctor" in a village commune in the People's Republic of China or make my life on a lesbian commune in New England; I may become a hereditary or elected head of state or wash the underwear of a millionaire's wife; I may serve my husband his early-morning coffee within the clay walls of a Burbar village or march in an academic procession; whatever my status or situation, my derived economic class, whatever my sexual preference or lifestyle, I live under the power of the fathers, and I have access only to so much of privilege or influence as the patriarchy is willing to accede to me and only for so long as I will pay the price for male approval. And this power goes much further than laws and customs; in the words of Brigitte Berger, "until now a primarily

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masculine intellect and spirit have dominated in the interpretation of society and culture—whether this interpretation is carried out by males or females . . . fundamentally masculine assumptions have shaped our whole moral and intellectual history."

Matrilineal societies—in which kinship is traced and property transmitted through the mother's line—or matrilocal societies, where the husband moves into the house or village of the wife's mother—exist as variations on the more familiar Western pattern of the patriarchal family which is also patrinomial, patrilineal, and patrilocal and in which, without the father's name, a child is "illegitimate." But these variations merely represent different ways of channeling position and property to the male; they may confer more status and dignity on women and reduce the likelihood of polygamy, but they are not to be confused with "matriarchy." Nor, as Angela Davis has noted, can a black woman who is the head of her household be termed a "matriarch" while she is powerless and oppressed in the larger society.

David Schneider finds three constants in matrilineal descent groups: women are responsible for the care of children, and every child is the primary responsibility of a particular woman even where other women share its care; adult men have authority over women and children; and descent-group exogamy (marrying out of the maternal family) is required. Schneider makes the relative power of men and women extremely clear: women and children are under male authority "except perhaps for specially qualifying conditions applicable to a very few women of the society. Positions of highest authority within the matrilineal descent group will . . . ordinarily be vested in statuses occupied by men."

The advantages to women of a matrilineal over a patrilineal order are actually slight. The emotional bonds between a mother and her children are subject to the strain of the father's kinship group pulling the child away from the maternal descent group; patricularly in the case of sons, "economic cooperation and the transfer of property between father and child" has a compelling effect in weakening the emotional and psychological authority of the mother. The reverse is not true in patrilineal societies because the mother, however strongly bonded with her children emotionally, has no power beyond that relationship which might challenge the power of father-right.

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Robert Briffault goes to some pains to show that matriarchy in primitive societies was not simply patriarchy with a different sex in authority; he reserves the term "gynocracy" for a situation in which women would have economic domination and control through property. He points out that the matriarchal elements in any society have had a *functional* origin—i.e., the maternal function of gestating, bearing, nurturing, and educating children—and that with this function in early society went a great deal of activity and authority which is now relegated to the male sphere outside the family. Briffault's matriarchal society is one in which maternal concerns and instincts are pervasive and women have organic authority, rather than one in which the woman establishes and maintains domination and control over the man, as the man over the woman in patriarchy. There would be, according to Briffault, a kind of free consent to the authority of women in a matriarchal society, because of her involvement with the essential practical and magical activity of that society. He thus sees matriarchy as organic by nature: because of the integration of agriculture, craft, invention, into the life centered around the mother and her children, women would be involved in a variety of creative and productive roles. Patriarchy, in Briffault's view, develops when men revolt against this organic order, by establishing economic domination and by taking over magical powers previously considered the domain of women. Gynocracy, like patriarchy, would be a holding of power through force or economic pressure and could only exist with the advent of private ownership and the economic advantage of one group over another.

At the core of patriarchy is the individual family unit which originated with the idea of property and the desire to see one's property transmitted to one's biological descendants. Simone de Beauvoir connects this desire with the longing for immortality—in a profound sense, she says, "the owner transfers, alienates, his existence into his property; he cares more for it than for his very life; it overflows the narrow limits of his mortal lifetime, and continues to exist beyond the body's dissolution—the earthly and material incorporation of the immortal soul. But this survival can only come about if the property remains in the hands of its owner; it can be his beyond death only if it belongs to individuals in whom he sees himself projected, who are *his*." A crucial moment in human consciousness, then, is when man

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asserts that it is himself, not the moon or the spring rains or the spirits of the dead, who impregnates the woman; that the child she carries and gives birth to is "his" child, who can make *him* immortal, both mystically, by propitiating the gods with prayers and sacrifices when he is dead, and concretely, by receiving the patrimony from him. From this nexus of sexual possession, property ownership, and the desire to transcend death, developed the institution we know: the present-day patriarchal family with its division of roles by gender, its emotional, physical, and material possessiveness, its ideal of monogamous marriage until death (and its severe penalties for adultery by the wife), the "illegitimacy" of a child born outside wedlock, the economic dependency of women, the unpaid domestic services of the wife, the obedience of women and children to male authority, the imprinting and continuation of heterosexual roles, and the supernaturalizing of the penis.

Again some combination or aspect of these values prevails, whether in an Orthodox Jewish family where the wife mediates with the outer world and earns a living to enable the husband to study Torah; or for the upper-class European or Oriental couple, both professionals, who employ servants for domestic work and a governess for the children. They prevail even where women are the nominal "heads of households." For every mother, however much she may act the coequal provider or so-called "matriarch" within her own family, must deliver her children over within a few years of their birth to the patriarchal system of education, of law, of religion, of sexual codes; she is, in fact, *expected* to prepare them to enter that system without rebelliousness or "maladjustment" and to perpetuate it in their own adult lives. Patriarchy depends on the mother to act as a conservative influence, imprinting future adults with patriarchal values even in those early years when the mother-child relationship might seem most individual and private; it has also assured through ritual and tradition that the mother shall cease, at a certain point, to hold the child—in particular the son—in her orbit. Certainly it has created images of the Mother which reinforce the conservatism of motherhood and convert it to an energy for the renewal of male power.

Of these images, and their implications for the whole spectrum of human relations, there is much still unsaid. Women have *been* both mothers and daughters, but have written little on the subject;

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the vast majority of literary and visual images of motherhood come to us filtered through a collective or individual male consciousness. As soon as a woman knows that a child is growing in her womb, she falls under the power of a tangle of theories, ideals, archetypes, descriptions of her new existence, almost none of which have come from other women (though other women may transmit them) and all of which have floated invisibly about her since she first perceived herself to be female and therefore potentially a mother. We need to know what, out of all that welter of image-making and thought-spinning, is worth salvaging, if only to understand better an idea so crucial in history, a condition which has been wrested from the mothers themselves to buttress the power of the fathers.

Outside of the mother's brief power over the child—subject to patriarchal interference—women have experienced power in two forms, both of them negative. The first is men's power over us—whether physical, economic, or institutional—along with the spectacle of their bloody struggles for power over other men, their implicit sacrifice of human relationships and emotional values in the quest for dominance. Like other dominated people, we have learned to manipulate and seduce, or to internalize men's will and make it ours, and men have sometimes characterized this as "power" in us; but it is nothing more than the child's or courtesan's "power" to wheedle and the dependent's "power" to disguise her feelings—even from herself—in order to obtain favors or, literally, to survive.

The possibility of "power" for women has historically been befogged by obscurantism, sentimentality, and mystification. When the Grimké sisters began to speak before antislavery societies in the 1830s, they were breaking with a convention that forbade women to appear on public platforms. "A Pastoral Letter from the Congregational Church" was issued against them, saying:

> The appropriate duties and influence of women are clearly stated in the New Testament. Those duties and that influence are unobtrusive and private, but *the sources of mighty power.* When the mild, dependent softening influences upon the sternness of man's opinion is fully exercised, the society feels the effect of it in a thousand forms. *The power of woman is her dependence*, flowing from the consciousness of that weakness which God has

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> given her for her protection. But when she assumes the place and tone of man as a public reformer . . . she yields *the power which God has given her for her protection*, and her character becomes unnatural. . . . (emphasis mine)

It was as if in answer to such sentiments that Olive Schreiner, in 1883, made her heroine Lyndall burst forth in response to her friend Waldo's remark that "some women have power":

> "Power! Did you ever hear of men being asked whether other souls should have power or not? It is born in them. You may dam up the fountain of water and make it a stagnant marsh, or you may let it run free and do its work; but *you* cannot say whether or not it shall be there; *it is there*. And it will act, if not openly for good, then covertly for evil; but it will act. . . . Power!" she said suddenly, smiting her little hand upon the rail. "Yes, we have power; and since we are not to expend it in tunnelling mountains, nor healing diseases, nor making laws, nor money, nor on any extraneous object, we expend it on *you*. You are our goods, our merchandise, our material for operating on. . . . We are not to study law, nor science, nor art; so we study you. There is never a nerve or fibre in your man's nature but we know it. . . ."

For a moment, in this passage, Olive Schreiner brushes against a somewhat different definition of power—but only for a moment. Her Lyndall is a woman of intense energy, longing for education and for "extraneous objects" in the form of ideas into which to pour that energy. And she experiences herself as potentially malign, if that energy is to be denied any outlet except the "appropriate duties and influence of women." For centuries women have felt their active, creative impulses as a kind of demonic possession. But no less have men identified and punished such impulses as demonic: the case of Anne Hutchinson is merely one example.

Besides men's power over us, and our own discernment of something denied and aborted in us, women have also felt man's *powerfulness* in the root sense of the word (*potere, posse,* or *pouvoir*—to be able, to be capable)—expressed in the creations of his mind. In the torsion of a piece of music or the spatial harmony of a building, in the drenching light of a painting, the unity and force of an intellectual structure, we have experienced that *powerfulness* as the expressive

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energy of an ego which, unlike ours, was licensed to thrust itself outward upon the world. If we have experienced man's brute battle for power as a terror, often visited directly on ourselves and our children, we have also known this other powerfulness, not our own, set before us as a measure of human aspiration. To have some link with male power has been the closest that most of us could come to sharing in power directly; to have no link with any form of male power, however petty and corrupt, has meant that we lived unprotected and vulnerable indeed. The idea of power has, for most women, been inextricably linked with maleness, or the use of force; most often with both.

But we have also experienced, more intuitively and unconsciously, man's fantasies of our power, fantasies rooted far back in his infancy, and in some mythogenic zone of history. Whatever their origins, for most women these male fantasies, because so obliquely expressed, have been obscured from view. What we did see, for centuries, was the hatred of overt strength in women, the definition of strong independent women as freaks of nature, as unsexed, frigid, castrating, dangerous; the fear of the maternal woman as "controlling," the preference for dependent, malleable, "feminine" women. Margaret Mead suggests that the opening of the American frontier required that a different kind of valuation be placed on female qualities and that "strong women, women with character and determination, in fact women with guts, became more and more acceptable." However, she acknowledges that women were still expected to be capable of "pleasing men"; and as the West was opened and a new leisure class began to establish itself in the cities, the "strong" female of the frontier declined in value, as Veblen and Emily James Putnam make abundantly clear. That *all* women might at some profound level be the objects of men's fear and hatred has only slowly begun to melt into our awareness through the writings of some post-Freudians, and it is an insight which women still resist. Karen Horney remarks:

> Is it not really remarkable (we ask ourselves in amazement) when one considers the overwhelming mass of this transparent material, that so little recognition and attention are paid to the fact of men's secret dread of women? It is almost more remarkable that women themselves have so long been able to overlook it. . . .

She suggests that behind women's obliviousness of this male dread

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lie "anxiety and the impairment of self-respect." Anxiety there certainly is; the anxiety of the objectified who realizes that however much she may *wish* to render herself pleasing and nonthreatening, she will still to some degree partake of the feared aspect of Woman, an abstraction which she feels has nothing to do with her. Since politically and socially men do wield immense power over women, it is unnerving to realize that your mate or employer may also fear you. And if a woman hopes to find not a master but a brother, a lover, an equal, how is she to meet this dread? If it brings to her intimations of a power inherent in her sex, that power is perceived as hostile, destructive, controlling, malign; and the very idea of power is poisoned for her. We shall have to return to this fear of women; for the present it must be repeated that women's primary experience of power till now has been triply negative: we have experienced masculine power as oppression; we have experienced our own vitality and independence as somehow threatening to men; and, even when behaving with "feminine" passivity, we have been made aware of masculine fantasies of our potential destructiveness.

Today, one quest of women is a search for models or blueprints of female power which shall be neither replications of male power nor carbon-copies of the male stereotype of the powerful, controlling, destructive woman. The resurgence of interest in the work of J.J. Bachofen, Robert Briffault, Joseph Campbell, Robert Graves, Helen Diner, Jane Harrison, the response generated by E.G. Davis's *The First Sex*, has been in part a search for vindication of the belief that patriarchy is in some ways a degeneration, that women exerting power would use it differently from men: nonpossessively, nonviolently, nondestructively. The matriarchal controversy has arisen directly from this quest, and has served as a catalyst for reexamining the reaction against "biology" which was necessarily an early stage in feminist thought. Two widely read women theorists, Helen Diner (first published in Germany in the late 1920s) and Elizabeth Gould Davis (writing in the 1970s) both draw heavily on earlier writers, notably Bachofen and Briffault, to argue that woman's physiology was the original source of her prepatriarchal power, both in making her the source of life itself and in associating her more deeply than man with natural cycles and processes. Both writers envisioned a prehistoric civilization centered around the female, both as mother and

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head of family, and as deity—the Great Goddess who appears throughout early mythology, as Tiamat, Rhea, Isis, Ishtar, Astarte, Cybele, Demeter, Diana of Ephesus, and by many other names: the eternal giver of life and embodiment of the natural order, including death.

For Diner and Davis, Woman as Mother naturally led to gynarchy: to societies headed by and marked with profound reverence for women. Other writers, including Simone de Beauvoir and Shulamith Firestone, deny that either a "matriarchal" or "gynocratic" order ever existed and perceive women's maternal function as, quite simply and precisely, the root of our oppression. Whatever the conclusion drawn, there is an inescapable correlation between the idea of motherhood and the idea of power.

The social philosopher Philip Slater, for example, sees real evidence for an early matriarchal culture in Greece, supplanted by patriarchy in later times, although he hesitates to assume a like transition from matriarchal to patriarchal power in other cultures, since "the *ontogenetic* experience of primeval matriarchy is universal, and may provide the source of much of this tradition" in mythology and folklore. In other words (and this was Freud's view) each woman and each man has once, in earliest infancy, lived under the power of the mother, and this fact alone could account for the recurrence of dreams, legends, myths, of an archetypal powerful Woman, or of a Golden Age ruled by women. Whether such an age, even if less than golden, ever existed anywhere, or whether we all carry in our earliest imprintings the memory of, or the longing for, an individual past relationship to a female body, larger and stronger than our own, and to female warmth, nurture, and tenderness, there is a new concern for the *possibilities* inherent in beneficent female power, as a mode which is absent from the society at large, and which, even in the private sphere, women have exercised under terrible constraints in patriarchy.

If such a thing as a historical moment exists, we arrive there mysteriously and unintentionally. Yet people whose individual lives have to some extent mirrored or generated the historical process can, at least, say what influences we think brought us where we are. The

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history of patriarchy is yet to be written—I do not mean the history of men, but of an idea which arose, prospered, had its particular type of expression, and which has proved self-destructive. But there are four or five movements of recent history which seem to intersect here. One is the so-called "sexual revolution" of the sixties—briefly believed to be congruent with the liberation of women. The "pill," it was believed by some, would release women from the fear of pregnancy, hence from the double standard, and would make us sexually co-equal with men. For many reasons, this proved a myth; it did not mean that we were free to discover our own sexuality, but rather that we were expected to behave according to male notions of female sexuality as surely as any Victorian wife, though the notions themselves had changed. And the "pill" itself is a mechanistic and patriarchal device, physically dangerous to many, perhaps all, women. It is unlikely that any technical innovation can alone liberate anyone, anywhere. But the liberalization of sexual attitudes, the increase in pre- and extramarital sex, the growing divorce rate, and the acknowledgedly threadbare texture of the nuclear family, did lead toward a new recognition of the contradictions between patriarchal theory and practice. A classic contradiction is the prevalence of rape, which is estimated to be the most frequently committed violent crime in America today. As one writer points out, rape illuminates the sexual schizophrenia of the society in which "the masculine man is . . . expected to prove his mettle as a protector of women," while rape is also a measure of virility.* But it is more than simply an all-American crime. From the Book of Numbers (31: 14-36), which describes the rape of 32,000 Midianite women by order of Moses, to the recent rape by Pakistani soldiers of 200,000 women of Bangladesh, rape remains the great unpunished war crime in every culture. As a crime of violence committed by a man against his wife, it is not even legally recognized.

Also relevant are the movements for ecology and zero population growth. These have arisen, to be sure, not from any primary concern for women, but from the pressures generated by the wastefulness of technological society and the misallocation and monopoly of resources on the planet, which are usually referred to as the problems of famine and overpopulation. In the ecological analysis there has been some

*Susan Griffin, "Rape: The All-American Crime," in Jo Freeman, ed., *Woman: A Feminist Perspective*, Mayfield Publishing Co., 1975.

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fresh examination of the values of technologically oriented society, recognition not only of its capricious lack of thrift and short-sighted profiteering, but of the increasing disappearance of certain values such as intimacy, protectiveness toward the living, respect for variety and variation, and for natural processes. To some extent this analysis might be seen as a reassertion of prepatriarchal values. However, these movements do aim, among other things, at a reduction of the birth rate; and they are presumably prepared to achieve this, if expedient, by propaganda aimed at evoking guilt in women who wish to become biological mothers.

Moreover, the control by women of their bodies has never been recognized as a primary issue in these movements. A report by a British feminist on the International World Population Conference at Bucharest in 1974 notes that:

> Despite lip-service to the idea that couples and families (*never* women) should have the right to determine the number and spacing of their children, in no case is this right seen as more important than the requirements of the economy. A brief look at the history of the developed countries—both capitalist and socialist—over the past 50 years will confirm that it is always women who are expected to adjust their fertility to the need for labor or cannon-fodder, never the economy which must adapt to an increasing or decreasing birthrate.

In contrast, the Black nationalist movement has declared that birth control and abortion are "genocidal" and that Black women should feel guilty if they do *not* provide children to carry on the Black struggle for survival. Black women have increasingly rejected this rhetoric, however, and have criticized "the irresponsible, poorly thought-out call to young girls, on-the-margin scufflers, every Sister at large to abandon the pill that gives her certain decision power, a power that for a great many of us is all we know, given the setup in this country and in our culture." A community organizer and mother, Janis Morris states that "the Black woman has got to consider what is best for the child during pregnancy and after birth, and too often she has to bear all the responsibility alone. So frankly, when the sister tells a brother 'I'm not going to have this baby,' it ain't nobody's business but her own."

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None of these movements, for or against the limitation of births, has the condition of women at heart as a root of insight; all are prepared to dictate to women—as patriarchy has always dictated—whether or not and under what circumstances to "produce" children. As the sociologist Jessie Bernard puts it:

> It was not until the later 1960s that motherhood became a serious political issue in our country. Like so many other issues, it came not in clear-cut, carefully thought-through form but in a murky conglomerate of ecology, environmental protection, and a "welfare mess." It took an "antinatalist" slant. The problem posed was how to stop women from having so many babies. Ecologists frightened us with images of millions suffocating for lack of oxygen and hostile reformers with images of women—especially black women—having babies in order to remain on welfare rolls. The first group directed their attack against middle-class women, the second, against welfare women.

A third strand in this historical pattern is technological; the genetic revolution, now in progress in laboratories, which has already developed the "sperm bank" and artificial insemination, and is now at work on "cloning" or the controlled reproduction of selected types through the growing, in a matrix, of cell nuclei transplants from a single "parent," to create a series of genetically identical offspring. Shulamith Firestone, an enthusiastic believer in replacing biological with artificial motherhood, has observed that the possibilities are terrifying if we envision the choice of human types, gender, and capacities being controlled by patriarchy. On the other hand, if biological motherhood can become a real choice (as distinct from being forcibly proscribed or rendered obsolete by fiat) then the concept of woman as womb, and of "biological destiny" becomes harder to defend. And these concepts have buttressed the structure of patriarchy from the first.

There has been another, vaguer movement of the human psyche: a seeming cultural rejection of masculinism itself. Even in the mid-fifties, a few scattered male writers such as de Rougemont and Neumann had begun to identify the denial of "the feminine" in civilization with the roots of inhumanity and self-destructiveness and to

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call for a renewal of "the feminine principle." In *The Flight from Woman*, a book full of patriarchal-theological bias and of suggestive but uncompleted insights, Karl Stern, a Jewish Freudian analyst turned Catholic, sees the scientific mode of knowledge beginning with Descartes as a rejection of the "feminine" mode of knowledge associated with intuition, spirituality, and poetry; and announces "the mystery of Androgyny . . .* manifest in the historical crisis" of the present. More recently, writers ranging from the philosopher Herbert Marcuse to the poet Robert Bly, have suggested that a return to the "feminine" (Marcuse calls it "the femalization of man") is the next stage in the development of the species. This "feminine principle," however, like "androgyny," remains for such writers elusive and abstract and seems to have, for them, little connection with the rising expectations and consciousness of actual women. In fact, Marcuse and Bly might be likened to the St.-Simonians and Shelley, who likewise insisted theoretically on the importance of the feminine, yet who betrayed much of the time their unconscious patriarchal parochialism.

Philip Slater also sees the need for a radical change in sexual consciousness if contemporary society is not to commit suicide. He perceives women as the peripheral members of the society, therefore "in a better position to liberate (it) emotionally"—whatever this may mean, since he discounts the likelihood that women will actually rise up against patriarchal values. Slater never characterizes the self-destructive society as patriarchal, but in his discussion of the "concept of the tyrannical father" in the American unconscious—dis-

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* "Androgyny" has recently become a "good" word (like "motherhood" itself!) implying many things to many people, from bisexuality to a vague freedom from imposed sexual roles. Rarely has the use of the term been accompanied by any political critique. Carolyn Heilbrun argues in her *Toward A Recognition of Androgyny* that an "androgynous" undercurrent runs throughout Western humanism, which if recognized would help us to free ourselves and society from the role-playing and division of labor required under patriarchy. Other writers have criticized the reactionary associations of "androgyny"; as Catherine Stimpson points out, "the androgyne still fundamentally thinks in terms of 'feminine' and 'masculine'. It fails to conceptualize the world and to organize phenomena in a new way that leaves "feminine' and 'masculine' behind." (Catherine R. Stimpson, "The Androgyne and the Homosexual", in *Women's Studies*, 1974, Vol. 2, pp. 237-248. See also Cynthia Secor, "Androgyny: An Early Reappraisal"; Daniel A. Harris, "Androgyny: The Sexist Myth in Disguise"; Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, "The Politics of Androgyny", in the same issue, and Janice Raymond, "The Illusion of Androgyny" in *Quest, A Feminist Quarterly*, Vol. 2, #1, Summer, 1975). Finally, the very structure of the word replicates the sexual dichotomy and the priority of *andros* (male) over *gyne* (female). In a truly postandrogynous society the term "androgyne" would have no meaning.

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placed, as he notes, from the actual father onto some abstract authority, fantasy-father, or onto technology itself—he implies that patriarchy is the real name of the system he is describing and which is ultimately dangerous to human existence.

None of these writers mention the possibility that a "return to the feminine" may actually involve pain and dread, and hence active resistance, on the part of men. We do not find in their work any such powerful analysis of the nature and extent of patriarchy as in Firestone, Millett, and Daly; but we do find corroboration of a sense that patriarchy, in degrading and oppressing its daughters, has also, at some less overt level, failed its sons.

We find some sense of this in the "Movement" of the 1960s, despite the profound sexism underlying its apparent rejection of racist violence and the Vietnam war. Men who refused to serve in the armed forces, and who underwent imprisonment or exile as the penalty for their decisions, demonstrated a revulsion against the patriarchal stereotypes of authoritarianism, militarism, nationalism, "being a man." (The "counter-culture" style of unisex clothing, male self-adornment, gentler manners, long hair, was a more superficial token. Much might be written on the various costumes in which male privilege and male supremacism have masked, as well as advertised, themselves in our time.) The peace movement, sexist as it was ("Chicks Say Yes to Men Who Say No"), expressed disenchantment with the patriarchal values of violence, supertechnology, and imperialism. The student radicalism of the sixties commonly met with the charge that these young people were in revolt against their fathers, "acting-out" their Oedipal rage; but in fact the "counter-culture" (most of it, to be sure, soon absorbed into the omnivorous Culture) did for awhile constitute an unconscious critique of the authority-through-role or through force which has characterized patriarchy. There was a fleeting revolt against the kind of education which, in Mitscherlich's terms, "often takes the form of terrorism rather than of guidance toward independence." The teacher was for the first time asked to justify himself as a human being rather than as a role; obedience was seen as the reverse of learning. This questioning of the power relationship in education often took on an aggressive, antiintellectual and destructive style, thoroughly masculinist in its dehumanization of the individual teacher facing the classroom. Yet it, too, sprang from some

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kind of instinctual resistance to the dehumanization of the student in the learning process, the sense of being "merely a number" or a bank in which information is deposited.

But these tendrils of antimasculinism straggled forth quite innocent of any antimasculinist theory and easily became subsumed under the macho ethic of SDS and Weathermen, with their sexual exploitation of women and their inherited theories of patriarchal revolution; or under the male homophile movement. In the "cooled-out," "laid-back" seventies, it is not uncommon for white middle-class American males to feel more comfortable in adopting a "gentle" style, to talk about wanting to cry, or even to do so, to show more physical affection for other men, to take pleasure in being with young children. Yet it is precisely their privilege as males that allows them to do this, just as well-to-do homosexuals have been freer to live openly according to their sexual preference. Strength and leadership in women is far less acceptable, and it is frequently the gentle, passive man who requires inordinate amounts of female attention, and who prefers the company of women where he is appreciated as an "exceptional" man. At the same time, in the mid-1970s, a reaction has made itself felt in the form of what Susan Sontag has identified as an eroticization of Nazism, a cult of fascist aesthetics. It is no accident, I think, that this fascination with the regalia of storm troopers has arisen along with a pervasively changing consciousness on the part of women. Nazism had a clear and unmistakable political formula for women and where they belonged: mothers of men, *kinder, kirche, kuche.* It glorified as no other twentieth-century system has done, the healthy body of the racially "pure" woman as an incubator of heroes, of sons.

The mid-twentieth-century "second wave" of feminism has gone further and asked more than its predecessors. Like patriarchy itself, the extent and influence of the antipatriarchal movement is difficult to grasp. It is not defined by specific organizations, groupings, or factions, though these exist in abundance. It exists in many stages of development throughout the world, at the most local, pragmatic levels, as a network of formal and informal communications, as a growing body of analysis and theory, and as a profound moral,

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psychic, and philosophic perturbation, more and more resistant to pacification and reduction. For a movement which has existed in its present form less than a decade, it has already brought forth decisive shifts of value, relation, and identity among women of all ages and economic levels, many of whom would not call themselves feminists. It has opened a new range of choices to women, many of which seem private and inconsequential, yet each of which, multiplied by the thousands, has helped create a new climate of perception. For some women it has meant the emotional freedom to remain childless, for others the decision to have children but no husband, and to raise them without a father (as distinct from the classic predicament of the pregnant woman abandoned by her seducer or the family deserted by the father). For still others, the women's movement—directly or indirectly—has meant an end to guilt and confusion about lesbianism; or an increased awareness of bisexuality; for yet others, the adoption of a deliberate celibacy which is felt partly as a political act, partly as a way of breaking old psychological dependencies on men, or on sex itself as a drug. For some it has meant confirmation and strength in leaving a dead marriage; for others, the strength to enter a sexual relationship that attempts to transcend gender roles. Such choices and changes may as yet be actively embraced by only a minority of women; yet they resonate deep into the female community, and their micro-effects on the lives of countless women who do not call themselves feminists have yet to be assessed. In the growth of the movement, from the early political manifestos, pamphlets and guerilla theater, through the incalculable shock of common recognition shared by vast numbers of women who began, inwardly and in groups, to analyze our common situation, through the continuing struggle against the fragmentation of woman from woman (young from old, poor from middle class, White from Black, lesbian from "straight," the mothers from the childless) women have been learning, and teaching each other, not simply what kind of cultural and institutional web has imprisoned us, but how radical, and how inclusive, the implications of feminism really are. Elizabeth Oakes-Smith had demanded in 1852: "Do we really understand that we aim at nothing less than an entire subversion of the present state of society, a dissolution of the whole existing social compact?" By 1970, Shulamith Firestone was responding: "Rather than concentrating the

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female principle into a 'private' retreat—we want to rediffuse it—for the first time creating society from the bottom up." And Mary Daly continued, in 1973:

> Only radical feminism can act as the 'final cause', because of all revolutionary causes it alone opens up human consciousness adequately to the desire for non-hierarchal, non-oppressive society, revealing sexism as the basic model and source of oppression. (I hope my use of 'final cause' is clear: In 'tradition' the final cause is 'first', it is motivating purpose, an insight which elicits seeking, movement. It is 'first in the order of intention', opening the subject to action. . . . To say this is to see a priority for the women's movement as catalyst, as *the* necessary catalyst —hardly to see it as a self-enclosed system.) [Personal communication, Spring 1974]

The core intellectual vision of the feminist movement has been equivalent to that urged on the human species by E.M. Forster in 1910: *Only connect.* Where the two powerful shapers of contemporary Western thought, Marx and Freud, had completed—as if by some tacit collaboration—the centuries' process of dichotomizing "man" into mind/body, psychological/political, Simone de Beauvoir, in 1949, was bringing a phenomenological approach to bear on "discovering woman":

> So . . . we reject for the same reasons both the sexual monism of Freud and the economic monism of Engels. A psychoanalyst will interpret all social claims of women as phenomena of the "masculine protest"; for the Marxist, on the contrary, her sexuality only expresses her economic situation in more or less complex, roundabout fashion. But the categories of "clitorid" and "vaginal", like the categories of "bourgeois" or "proletarian" are equally inadequate to encompass a concrete woman. Underlying all individual drama, as it underlies the economic history of mankind, there is an existential foundation that alone enables us to understand in its unity that particular form of being which we call a human life.

What de Beauvoir is really suggesting is that masculine intellectual systems are inadequate because they lack the wholeness that female consciousness, excluded from contributing to them, could provide. In dominating, and then having to justify and rationalize their domination of women, the masculine systems-makers have created mutilated systems; in taking the "otherness" of the "second" sex for granted

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they have erected their systems on an essential intellectual fault. Truly to liberate women, then, means to change thinking itself: finally to reintegrate what has been named the unconscious, the subjective, the emotional with the structural, the rational, the intellectual; to "connect the prose and the passion" in Forster's phrase; and finally to annihilate those dichotomies. In the being of a woman sold as a bride, or rejected because she is "barren" and cannot produce sons to enhance a man's status, economics and sexuality, legalism and magic, caste structure and individual fear, barter and desire, coexist inextricably; only in the outer world of patriarchal categories and patriarchal denial can they be conceived as separate.

De Beauvoir in 1949 still saw the liberation of women as but one of many liberations which would come about as the result of socialist revolution, insofar as socialism promised to do away with private property and the patriarchal family and to release women into economic equality with men. Her experience and her analysis have since taken her further. But radical feminism is now speaking in terms of "feminist revolution", of a "postandrogynous" society, of creating a new kind of human being.

At one end of the spectrum is a tarpaper shack in Appalachia or rural New Hampshire, in which an eighteen-year-old mother of four is expecting her fifth child, her first menstrual period having been her last. Her legs are discolored with varicose veins, her abdominal wall permanently distended, her breasts already sagging, her teeth decaying from calcium loss. Functionally illiterate, she lives from hour to hour and day to day, her nights splintered by the crying of infants, her energy drained into the survival of lives which suck on her like mouths. To get to a birth control or prenatal clinic would be to command herself into a control of her existence which she has never had and of which, as one of eleven children herself, she has seen no example. She has not been physically away from her children since the conception of the first child, when she was thirteen years of age. When her husband rapes her, she does not call it rape, but somewhere in her memory lingers a distant past of twelve-year-old restlessness, curiosity, physical energy, and germinating desire—even, perhaps, some vague imagination that her life might be different

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from her mother's. Her sense of time is vague; it is impossible for her to imagine herself as a being separate from all these lives. Once in a while she looks into the glass and sees that she is becoming her mother.

At the other end of the spectrum, let us imagine a laboratory in which men—the most powerful men in history, it is said—are engaged in work of extreme delicacy and precision, preparing a new series of multiple, identical embryos from cells derived from selected human tissue. The embryos will come into consciousness with their identity already prepared, for they will have been selected to provide the patriarchy of a new generation, selected by the patriarchy of the current generation to perpetuate its own characteristics—especially those of rational genius, the gift of abstraction, and the ability to dissociate "work" from "personal" problems and disturbances. Females are also being bred, for specific physical characteristics, and they fall into two categories. One is a body-type, or range of body-types, capable of producing erections in a range of males, not for procreation but because impotence is an increasing problem since the end of physical paternity. The other is a body-type matched with mental qualities suited for special purposes, such as "manned" space flights requiring smallness of build, adaptiveness, physical endurance, and a low level of emotive intensity of desire for interhuman relation. The new males will be free from the disturbing effects of mother-love and mother-dominance; and the new females will not suffer from sex-role frustration, since no Joan of Arc, no Elizabeth I, no Mary Wollstonecraft, no Anne Hutchinson, no Sojourner Truth, no George Eliot, no Emma Goldman, no Margaret Sanger, no Gertrude Stein or Emily Dickinson has been or will be chosen for the reproduction of her "type" in quantity. Elite women, chosen by and working with men, are used not only as intellectual contributors to social engineering but also as donors of cell nuclei to insure that a token quantity of women can be produced as required. Thus, it is demonstrated that females with the proper endowment—though quantitatively much fewer—are valued as highly as males.

A revolution based on patriarchal socialism might abolish the tarpaper shack, but who could claim that it would abolish the engineering of society by men? For, however theoretically men may call for "women's liberation" in any social order they may devise, how-

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ever much they consciously may wish for an end to sexual caste, they still live in the unacknowledged cave of their own subjectivity, their denied fears and longings; and few men can bear to confront that shadow-world. For patriarchy, however much it has failed them, however much it divides them from themselves, is still *their* order, confirming them in privilege. They are protected from seriously addressing the issues of sexual caste and institutionalized misogyny, in large part by the central contradiction at the heart of patriarchy: the idea of the sacredness of motherhood, the redemptive power of women as means, and her degradation in the human species.

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# STORIES

## Harold Brodkey

## THE PAIN CONTINUUM

Momma occasionally displayed me naked to visitors. My sister Nonie often offers me to girls who will play with her—they can play with me, play house.

They can dress and undress me. The other girl may become sentimental, impassioned and busy, speechless. I may touch her hair, rub my cheek against hers, kiss her, even on the mouth.

It is maddening to be liked, to feel things—a thick, suffocating blanket that teases me and makes me fall on it, and roll, flattening it—a comforter—and seeing it rise, seeing it fluff up again.

I might strut, my belly out: I like to have my belly kissed—patted: I might throw myself onto the girl's lap, or into her arms, wriggle, then jump away, run off, hide; I may lurk in a hiding place: I will jump out, having become what the grownups call "wild."

Nonie and I go out into the wind. Giant paddle wheels of wind, atop the ridge, huge, skeletal vanes turn; and as they do, lift and flutter everything.

I am coated and trousered, suspendered, snapped and zipped, buttoned up, hatted, mittened, choked in thick, warm, puffy masses of insulation.

I am artificially pudgy—imprisoned.

I manage to get my hat off: my scalp crinkles: my whitish hair whips and snaps: my nose stings in the icily gliding and flapping air.

While I do this—remove my hat with my mittened hands—I drag my feet: Nonie says, "You walk just like a baby—oh you don't know how to walk right—you're so dumb. . . ."

My big wind-invaded-now jacket. Sun and wind tease my eyes. I

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squint. I turn my head this way and that—see things—jerkily—disconnectedly—passages, corridors of the day.

Our side porch is built on brick piers hidden by evergreens. Nonie has to pull and hold back branches of the yews for me: she knees me forward, pushes me with the side of her lower leg, toward a break in a trellis made of green lathes (nailed on the diagonal). The lathes that are broken end in naked wood, unpainted, splintery, shrill like the flames of kitchen matches. Most pains are at least in part like being burned by fire. I am into the windlessness of here-under-the-house.

The house stretches above me wood-walled, monstrous, apparently tilted, echoing.

It is almost hot under here (for me in my heavy clothes, bareheaded, squatting: very little heat comes from the house: it must be the airlessness, the motionlessness of the air here).

Nonie, partially visible through the lop-sided graph of the trellis, is huge: her head is invisible. The light is horizontal, weak where I am—is stronger on her. She stoops. The watery inner light laps at her knees, her hand which reaches inside to hold onto a pier: bent over, she enters.

On the ground is an inordinately fine blowy dust—blowy if you breathe on it—a dustlike dirt it is, undisturbed by wind: it is frailer and dryer and nastier than any other dust I've ever seen. It covers yellow-brown ugly dirt, nasty under-the-house dirt.

A plaid automobile rug, old and smelly, is under here with us; and a dented kettle lies tilted in a small hollow. There is a spoon, a mop handle, a dirtied doll, a hole: around its neck, in fissures, dust drooped, occasionally whispered, slid, and fell.

The comparative lightlessness, silence, secrecy, and morguishness suggest very loudly IT'S-TIME-TO-PLAY-NOW.

When we played in her room, she would end the game by announcing, "You've been bad—I have to spank you."

She would turn me over.

My bared bottom would seem to develop vision, to look up in a way at the air and at Nonie's uplifted hand with the doll in it that she intended to hit me with. It seemed her hand, in turn, was an eye looking at me.

If the blow was soft, then, all right: Nonie would fasten me up again: time would continue. She might try to do schoolwork and she'd

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fall asleep—let me say it this way: one day she climbed up on her bed, sat on it cross-legged, opened her school books, and fell asleep, sitting up: she snored very faintly, a young girl's snore: I tiptoed back to my own room.

But if when the doll hit me, it was as if I had a covering of dust, smartly disordered and scattered—but each particle glowed and had in it a bit of feeling which *I* felt; or if it was as if I was like a piano, strummed, jangled, chopped at—unsuspected elements in me would race and twang, I would be filled with sounds—and all this then resolved itself into an ache, a stone or a wall, with no face drawn on it, a sheer obduracy, then I was caught up in an unendurable storm of *nonsense*: much of the world was unreadable, was nonsense, newsprint, foliage, an adult running in a hallway—I heard noises, saw blurs: I did not know it was an adult, I did not realize anyone, or anything, was *running*. The linear, the comprehensible was tender—was meant for *a child*. One was very shy about *nonsense*—at least, I was. Nonsense was *another world*. Small, stinging pain was beyond sense: *Nonie hurt me:* incomprehension, adrenalin, and pain flowed together, side by side; or rather, formed, materialized at once, in the vial, the singular unity of a child's body. There were not too many substantial choices, automatic or conscious ones, but the repertoire grew as I did, as days passed, leaving a residue of captions, guesses, that the nights, and night-dreams played with—the nights were full of study. On one occasion, in Nonie's room, the child's face twists, he prepares to howl—"Don't be silly: we were only playing," she said, and she hugged me.

On another, the child rolls away, gets under the bed. It is another afternoon: the child knocks over a night table. And here, in a different light, he kicks his seated sister, holding his pants, while his eyed and warmed ass, outraged and awake, refused to be silent but silently howled behind him.

She will not let life be other than this.

If I refuse to be consoled, she buttons my clothes by force. If I get away, she says she was getting me ready to go to the bathroom and I try to make a mess—pee—in her room. A lie is designed for utterance: it is meant to be comprehended—it is not like the truth which is an utterance full of failure, of references, of an otherness to itself. A lie consoles and flatters with obvious and acceptable meanings: one's

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comfort, one's anger, are shown respect by some lies that other people tell us.

She says to me—in the afternoon light—"You're just a baby—you have to do what I say—I can get you into trouble."

She can—she can make Momma and Daddy sigh and be tired of me for a while.

If Daddy and Momma start to talk to each other about Nonie, they soon attack each other: "You babied her"

"You're a heartless mother"

"You don't care what happens to people—you're the irresponsible one in this house"

"You're selfish"

"You treat her like a doll"

"*You don't know how to treat her*"

"You admit it, you're accused out of your own mouth, oh Charley, you don't even know how to argue"

It is better for them to approve of Nonie; and anyway we're not sure, that in this world, as things go, Nonie is really awful.

One thing, though, is clear: Daddy will not correct her: and he is foot-stampingly not at fault: he is I-am-innocent. He will sometimes cry, he becomes helpless and grief-stricken if Nonie gets scurrilous enough in her tantrums. (Thunder storms make her hysterical and she accuses him and Momma of things she has overheard, she has learned about: she wets herself and screams and writhes and says, "God will kill you—he won't hurt *me*." She yells at him, "Go outside—let the lightning get you—make it leave me alone.") Daddy has no middle ground: he can only care about his home if it has no evil in it: he can only care about people he believes to be innocent. If it seems there is something malevolent in this house, something unpleasant, he gets very upset. "I don't understand," he says despairingly, "I don't understand."

Sometimes he will throw a tantrum then: he will stamp his foot—and shout—so that the furniture slides a little bit—that it is the school's fault or Momma's. "NONIE IS A GOOD GIRL!" He will shout: "SOMEONE IS RUINING HER." Then he subsides: he says, "There's a pain in my chest—I can't breathe."

He holds a hand to his chest: his eyes are stricken: it is frightening

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how sick of everything he is, then, for a while.

"He is more afraid of Nonie than of anyone," Momma said.

Nonie trafficked in innocence.

And in the opposite of it, in accusation, in cruelty.

Daddy used to say, "It's better to leave well enough alone." And: "Nonie's a fine girl—and that's the end of the subject." That was love and not-love. He didn't want to think about her.

If Nonie is playing with other children, the nurse takes me outside in the afternoons. If I see Nonie, I will run to her, and she will turn red and yell, "Get away, get him away, I'm busy—"

If I didn't go away but stood and stared at her—without comprehension—and if the nurse, who was fat, delayed—Nonie would come over and push me so that I would fall on my rump (she almost never hit me in front of witnesses: she'd learned that was not wise). Sometimes what she did made the people she was with uneasy—or they'd point-blank dislike her: she would blame me: I ruined everything for her *always*.

On the whole, it was better for me when she was pretty solidly defeated.

We play under the porch, and then Nonie has me lie down on the automobile blanket; and we go through the complexities of her undressing me: she pulls down my snowsuit pants, lifts my shirt and snowsuit jacket. I am nearly naked.

She wants to enjoy me as Momma does. But also she is curious why I am loved the way I am.

Nonie poked my belly with a stick: "You have appendicitis: I'm operating on you." She said of my prick, "It's silly." She poked it with her stick. I wriggled. I pushed at her hand. She stuck the twig in my ear: I struggled; then she stopped, and we played—I think she was an airline pilot doing an appendectomy in a thunderstorm. Then she tried to stick the twig into my mouth: I turned my head: she grabbed my nose, held it, pressed the nostrils together: for air, I opened my mouth: the twig, its bark, its smell of dust—it had lain in the dust—entered my *mouth*, touched my palate: I gagged.

Nonie slapped down my struggling arms and legs. "Do what I tell you! You have to do what I tell you! *We're playing a game!*"

She held my nose and put dirt in my mouth: "This is food—eat it—you have to eat it."

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I would think the thing of being suited to give birth would go along with an innate patience with, oh, physical explorations, curiosity about pain, about courage and submission. And nothing middle class approves of that; being middle class consists of privileges, of being spared pain. Maybe middle-class women become angry, impatient, secretive, somewhat crazed because they are separated from pain and effort and women must not be separated from pain and effort. Nothing in middle-class men shows they have equally bloody dichotomies and difficult fates and transformations in store for them (lower-class men are the soldiers: but perhaps there will be no more war). Maybe Nonie's mouth tasted of death, stank of dirt unaccountably: and so she hungered to force dirt between my lips to see if I would choke on the taste of burial, until I shared her fate with her and was a true brother—or maybe she simply hated *things* or she wanted to see acted out what filled her often, as in thunderstorms, that horror.

She always headed toward this in our games; sooner or later, she *always* said to me, "Be brave—why aren't you brave?"

She thought of herself as a hero.

The grownups keep her occupied with shopping and horseback and tennis and music lessons and carefully arranged afternoons with Jewish girls from other suburbs in order to prevent Nonie expressing herself in boredom, prevent her from becoming a duchess in an old, bloody play.

She dug, with the twig, a fake stethoscope, into the soft flesh between my legs, behind my balls.

I suddenly remember—I enter a continuum—of knowledge, urgent but without expression—sort of *Nonie-sometimes-does-bad-things-and-this-is-a-time-when-she*—is not to be accepted, perhaps.

I have a limited repertoire of warlike things: I struggle to my feet, in my wrappings, with my bared belly—or no: I rolled over, onto her leg, or rather right next to it, partly on it, and pushed at her with my mittened hands: she pushed my head back—my neck was bent—it hurt: not a lot: but it drew nets, sieves of being maddened: I was strained through a sieve and became a buzz, a hive of animus: I peed on her leg.

She didn't know—she didn't notice; and then she merely stirred because she didn't know; and then she suspected—and pushed me away from her so sharply, I lost consciousness briefly—and she yelled, "WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?"

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And: "DID YOU DARE DO THAT?"

"I'LL TEACH YOU A LESSON!"

She starts to slap me but stops and begins to wipe her leg with the blanket.

I get to my feet, clumsily, hurriedly, holding my snowsuit pants. When I am on my feet, I think, *run—run*—and then all at once, but slowly all at once, drowning out every other sensation, is the sensation that I am undressed and I am *here*—under-the-porch, in this silence, this dust, with her.

There is a vast and unexpected subtraction suddenly—where there ought to be people nearby, there are none: a shout will not frighten Nonie because here there are no linkages to inhabitants of the world and to the future. It is not the same here. This is a cave of games. It is unsafe and odd here.

I took a quick, childish inventory of skills, strengths, resources I might have, my allies, my ability to arouse love—in someone.

What is this girl going to teach me? What can she make me believe now? What can she turn the world into at this moment?

This is not a good moment.

I start to waddle away: she looks up, drops the blanket, scoots along her ass—she does not know this is a mimicry of an epic, a capture by a giant or by a siren, or that this is a cave—she thrusts her leg in front of me: gruntingly, she forces me backward, she pushes, corrals, knocks me down so that I sit on the wadded-up blanket—she does this with her fleshy, round-y leg.

Curiosity tempers fear. There is a strangely biological feel to ignorance: to *what now*. Also, to anger, to confronting her. I scowl at her: I look directly into her face and scowl. This excites me—and increases my anger—perhaps this time I will master the danger of her having her way with me.

I get up again and see a long mop handle in the dust, and I grab it.

The air is cold, or tingly, I mean, on my belly. One-handed, I raise the mop handle—and hit the porch roof with it. The vibrations that zoom along its length—something forces the stick from my hand. "Ha-ha: look at you—you're so stupid—"

This pleases her.

If one is helpless—or the underdog—one can rage as much as one likes—and one is still innocent.

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The actual inability to hurt someone strikes people who observe it in you as comic—you are comic.

It flashes through one, a heat, a blank fog, of surrender and of not-surrender to being comic, to being (angrily) the one who can be hurt.

I pick up the mop handle again and use it to poke and swing at the blowy dust, to fan dust toward her: I want to dirty her.

She takes hold of the mop handle with both her hands: she pulls—and it is gone, the mop handle is gone from me.

Her back is straight: her posture holds the lines of force of her kidnapping the stick.

I stoop and scrabble at the loose blowy dust. It has rough-edged flakes in it, bits of old house paint (those flakes), hard bits of foil. Caterpillary scrambling fingers gather it up, throw it. It hovers as if with great moral delicacy between Nonie and me. She waves it off: blows at it. It is terrible to attempt a maneuver that doesn't work at all. I stoop and dig with fingerends at the puke-colored under-the-house dirt.

The small clod I throw comes apart in the air: hypnotic flotillas float: the air is full of slowed dirt. She bats some of the pieces aside—ducks—but one lands on her cheek.

The moment becomes greatly vivid and enlarged. She leans back on her arms (the mop handle is held in her hand: she does nothing with it) and kicks at me: she reaches out her plump, round-y leg and her foot and kicks me in the chest (which is not very high for her).

Something like a knot of wood forms where she kicked me, a dulled, less sentient thing in me, it seems at first, rough-edged, discolored. It lodges in *me*, in what had the orderly-silky-toylike-rapid-thing-or-whatever-which-is-me-behind-and-below-my-throat. I am, or rather, my chest and nearby parts of me, are cast into a furnace of an unfamiliar throbbing: the wood feeds it: it is unpleasantly gooshy, knotty, grabby, twisty in me: the pain is heaviest at its center but most unsettling at its edges where it seems to push at me and crowd me.

What is unhurt in me seems to scream or half-scream with disowning what-is-hurt as well as with sympathy and surprise.

The hurt part of me is tragic and dishonored.

Inside the moment, Nonie is completely, unutterably mysterious to me. There is no worded or envisioned explanation: it is simply

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clear—but surprising—that she is this person.

The various doublenesses of experiencing this, of being hurt—and knowing it—make my heart beat in earnest.

Nonie kicked me again—in the stomach. I sat down in a bubble of asphyxiation.

Momma will say, "I'm not going to take sides! I can't defend him—I have other things to do—he's the boy—he's got to learn to live with her—let him learn to take life as it comes."

She will, however, blackmail Nonie and regard her coldly, even with disgust.

Nonie *decides* to laugh—you can see her face meeting in committee and coming to a decision—at my airlessness. When she laughs, although I have partly blacked out and can't breathe, I throw myself at her. Suddenly the mop handle—she holds it in one hand—is against my chest: then she uses two hands on the mop handle and thrusts me back. When she then thrusts the mop handle and hits me in the chest, it is almost in curiosity, or emphasis, an experiment, a particular kind of joke: he's-a-baby; it's a form of tidiness, of cleaning up—intellectually, perhaps—as of making things coincide geometrically.

Her tidiness and joking give me a sense of rage and dismissal, her dismissal from my childish consciousness: she is no longer real: she is an *enemy*.

The acceptable justification, acceptable to her, is *he's spoiled* and *he was bothering me.*

*Oh ha-ha, look what I am doing*—then a look of seriousness on her face—and then, in earnest, but superior: *he's such a pest.*

She was convinced, morally, that I ought not offer her any difficulty, ever.

She hit me lightly on the chest and then a little harder. Small lumps, knobs of being bumped, like thickened mosquito bites, formed: they did not engulf my consciousness but made me blink, surprised. She hit me harder, she drove the stick harder perhaps as an experiment in correcting my facial expression, my attitude, in making my affection more correct: she meant to put an end for once and for all to her being horrified by me.

It was like that.

When one is in pain of a sort—not overwhelmed, only partly maddened by it—having had the wind knocked out of one, being hit

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rapidly by the rounded end of a stick—one feels, primarily, A SURPRISE.

The SURPRISE is partly located near a bin of rage, of disbelief and rage: the mind is incredibly slow: its advance is halted by each blow: it is advancing slowly toward a wall, into a scream, into some other state of being.

One waits for an act to declare itself, to define itself, for this—*nameless*—event to have an expressible cause I can understand. But there is nothing inside the minute that seems to be a cause—except my—having fought with her.

So she is not fair. (Since I did not hurt her.)

She keeps hitting me, rapidly, not hard now; she is alert: she hits me to halt a yell I am about to make; she halts it in mid-throat.

SURPRISE and rage so push at me I begin movements that I am too startled to finish.

I am caught in a net of this, this incompleteness, I am penned in and netted—by her ability to—defend herself.

The part of me that receives blows is not me yet—I am too loose and communal an identity: it is Mommy-Daddy-the family that she is *hitting*.

Meanwhile I began to be crammed with sensations as with rocks piled in a heavy, smelly, stained canvas sack.

The communal pain—was patently not fit to be *looked at*: one disregarded it—and made faces at Nonie—and struggled in the sack.

It is dirty—there is dirt—on the nerves, around the heart, in the lungs: anyone undergoing pain longs for sepsis. It is half a grave: I am worth nothing to anyone: I have wood and stones of pain in me. I am unclean, unpretty. There was a web in me of shaken bile and shapelessness.

My sense of time was interfered with—this has been happening forever: hope and one's sense of place are tumbled: where-am-I? Anger, corrosively coerced anger, makes the eyes seem to jerk and bug out, in points, to touch with the tips of those points, tiny, incomprehensible areas visible on Nonie, an arc of cheek, eyelashes. Inside my chest, unknown things ache, liver, heart, spleen—the *lights*: jostled, they are phosphorescent; I hold organs of dully gleaming unseemliness. I am extraordinarily pure, one is pure, one is without volition: one is scrubbed—informed—moved by pain—to a higher level—to

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a height that causes sickness. The heart begins to shamble, askew.

The stick has literally jostled the heart.

All at once, without clear transition, one slides—I slid—into a gray, oily, uncertainly lit sleeve of almost complete pain. I could say my predicament usurped all my attention to such a degree that I forgot, I lost all sensual familiarity, I lost the immediacy of painlessness. Painlessness seemed impossibly far away.

I was in the pain continuum.

I was not exactly aware of this yet—I was simply loosely wrapped in, in a somewhat oily, dirty, semitransparent rubbery sense of dislocation and a loss of any ordinary attachment to life. Certain areas of logic had collapsed—momentarily—such as that of the expectation, the assurance of breath, or of sight. Indeed, it was a matter of the collapse of most of the ordinary expectations, a set of corrections: pain is a hell of corrections—they seem quite final—a hell of other-than-the-light-of-God. One can hate there. Happiness is nonexistent—is a lapse of attention, of intelligence—is a silly, grinning, leering idiocy. One is set free from the curatorship and bounding companionship and ignorance about one's happiness. One is set free in that one is pressed down; and what arises, from one's spirit, one's body, is not willed by one's self: one gives birth to—a field of dark flowers—various screams, uttered or unuttered, various grittings, various stares of anguish.

Memories that are impossible when one is happy or painless gather and make a complete world, a continuum, going back to the beginning. Dog-headed presences, loomings, old thumpings, prickings, hot, abominable, noisome, are here. They are ancient and can transform themselves.

I think too the presence of that memory of pain—I mean the completion of the pain continuum as a real world, maybe a realer one, shows on one's face: I think Nonie saw it—on my face—and I think that then she became more interested in what she was doing: she experienced an increase in the voltage of her interest in what was happening to me.

That interest was smeared with a sense of duty—a sense of duty made of two strands, pagan and animal, duty to herself, to the daylight, to winter, and a sense of social, ladylike duty: she was a nurse, a nursemaid, preventing me from doing harm: she was teaching me

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a lesson: she was taking care of justice in the world.

She had a look of scrubbing away—at a foulness—a look of excitement of a kind. She was intent, more than before, busy, pleased and busy.

My back, untouched by the pole, bristles, wrinkles.

I stare uncontrollably at her.

All at once she takes a short swing and hits me on the side of the head with the pole.

The bone of the skull vibrates, shudders in small arcs. I do not know I am hurt. My head and eyes—and mouth—are invaded by, they gorge on, skinny sensations, shiny, cold, lengthy, hurting.

The sensations spin and ring (like coins on marble or glass) but almost at once they grow thick, like dirty washrags in the basement, wet and foul: they grow thick and wadded and vile in me.

The air, here, under the porch, begins to show hostility toward me: it claps bits of my soreness between its fine, airless, cold-hot wings; it catches in its thin ribbon claws bits of raw, pummelled, half-bruised skin: it rubs with abrasive cold: stabs at the sewn in, clutching stars of heat and ache. Still, there is no disbelief.

What does Nonie see in the child's face? Perhaps what she sees illuminates her life.

Walls of oilskin, drooping, wrinkled, slimy, rise around me. I can hardly see. I am panting now.

She says, "See, you don't know how to play, you don't play right, I can hurt you, you can't hurt me."

On this occasion, it first occurs to me—it brings on overwhelming rage—that she brought me here in order to do this, she meant to hurt me.

We are brother and sister.

I am dazed and enraged and struck in the increasing animal difficulty for me of the moment.

That part of religious emotion which is I-was-happy-once-but-it-was-taken-from-me-and-will-be-restored-to-me was on Nonie's face.

A child's dislike for someone often takes the form of an erasure, an obliteration in the child's mind: "Wiley, don't you see Nonie is talking to you . . . ?" I didn't hear her or see her: she went spinning

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away, as if a telescope, wrong-ended, hid her: she was quaint with distance: *my sister.* Her pain did not exist for me—nor did her pleasure. I did not care about it, I did not know it was there—her life, her rights. She was a roughened blur, like an erasure where the paper grows furry and there is a yellowish oval and a hole where the light shows through.

The bony fingers of winter air.

The smell of Nonie's navy blue schoolgirl coat. The smell of her coat. Of her hair.

"I'm the good one—you're the bad one," she said as she hit me—on the chest, with her stick.

But her face had a look of malice, meant to terrorize—*look and fear me.*

*She is just a child . . . .*

How is she to avoid being enslaved?

She meant no harm. Yes, she did.

This is my first, uncertain knowledge of evil.

If I fell apart—and was guilty—and helpless . . . .

There are fashions, standards, in crimes, in treatments.

Under the porch there was, as a form of anesthesia, a god's presence. She felt that too.

She will jab with the stick into my stomach hard enough that my hands will float helplessly—and my head will loll—there is no air: she has taken all the air, put it in a basket, put the basket behind her: I can have no air . . . Nonie says so.

Say that love animates her.

She said, "I have common sense."

Not on this occasion—some other one, in a living room, in a car, a moving car.

She talks to keep it a world that she belongs in, that she is not unsuitable for. The ego world of dreams extended into her waking life: she was Baudelairean, Proustian.

If one established a this-is-bad-I-won't-feel-anything-I-won't-cry-I'll-wait-until-it's-all-over (that is, I won't try to understand this thing that's happening), it breaks the connection between you and your tormentor: it ruins the game: everything your tormentor knows is made into a pointless bludgeoning, a blundering craziness.

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And it is easy to do this, in some parts of the pain continuum, to leave someone behind, to leave them and there they are, alone. I discarded everything that made me her accomplice.

Now who will love her? I have undermined her hopes so that she is throwing herself away: she is hardly more than this: a girl with a stick.

There comes an irregular gasping rhythm to *her* breath: a greater righteousness, a beleagured righteousness: she begins a half-murmured half-laugh and then continues it: she is half-laughing, corrosively, to fill me with the acid thing of it's-easy-for-her-to-win-out-over-me.

She is leaning forward: she wants to see clearly.

She is correcting—the ambiance—the impression I make on the—episode: it is terrible to me when her eyes pore over my face with their curiously narrow clarity of studying the power and success or powerlessness and failure of her correction of me.

She did not usually, or perhaps ever, think of herself as stupid—she felt only that she was innocent, menaced, a girl.

I know I have been tempted to be violent, to slice someone's head open, only when there has been the revelation, the abrupt emergence, of the fact of my superiority, undeniably—in my view, by my standards—a fact made overt beyond my caution's denying it any longer: some incredibly long drawn-out stupidity in the person I am trying to respect becomes insistently noticeable: my egoist's fantasies of supermanhood are suddenly verified: suddenly the fact emerges: and that fact is being ignored, trampled on, forever obscured. The logic of superiority is that it be recognized. Bloodshed is an attempt to make the world properly, obviously logical.

I did not think she would hurt me—or to be accurate, I did not suspect that there would be more pain, greater pain.

She moved the stick: jabbed with it—it danced in front of my eyes. Against my will, my nerves were drawn to that, reacted to that: there had been, if not a vivifying of the nerves, then their triumph as being the sole story, as being the curtain that filtered everything—the pain, the pained excitement of my nerves I should say—and that pain—and excitement colored the glozing sound of the pulse in one's head: life-was-bad—the pulsing hurt, with every ballooning of it. My fixated, not hypnotized, but coerced vision, its concentration on that dancing stick, so near to my face: the pain or bump on the side of my

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head: the pains, confused now, overlaid, being of various kinds, on and in my chest, were in some instances like a glare and noise, and in others like the night, the night outdoors, a bulge of murmurs, perhaps menaces, a row of bulging trees, weighting down, rustling—the rustling of sensation.

My contempt for her was a failure of belief, a measurement of her: she is bluffing.

I do not have to fear her if she cannot hurt me.

But meanwhile my face, against my will, winces: I suffer the foretaste, the imagination of blows, an imagination based on other experiences, such as falling on concrete, such things as that: but a falling has been converted to a—to a *joke*: a joke is you-can't-scream-this-is-a-joke: that is, the comic is an inability, an absolute inability to hurt or kill. I have already been hurt—but it is as much mental as physical: this reintroduction to the pain world, the pain continuum in my life. But I am on my feet, I am not screaming, I can manage to hold Nonie in contempt. This is not an absolute joke—I can still hate her for this—but it is still a joke, a bad joke: it isn't death so far as I know.

When the mop handle approached my face, my skin nearest it, the skin of my face would shrivel circularly, would pucker—I would be clutched by cold, as if in preparation to be hit, the cold of incipient shock, of anesthesia, of purposeful and unpurposeful anesthesia, humiliation.

Then the cold would turn into a chafing—as it might after I fell and was not seriously wounded (no brain concussion, no tearing open of my nose)—a chafing which led to an abraded heat: but the chafing was also the humiliation of she-made-me-think-I-was-about-to-be-hit (and-dissolved). Anger, somewhat diluted by helplessness, by concern about what is going to happen next, about when-will-this-end, oozes into a stinging sweat, pure, that is, light and childish, a smoothed, horrible sweat of it-is-over, which was foolishness, since here the stick comes again: I hated the—burning—foolishness, the humbling, and angering, chagrin, the being a puppet in this way—shrivelled, chilled, chafed, opened out into anger—chagrin, too, at ever having liked my tormentor, at having been fool enough to come here: or to put it in terms closer to the wordless ones of what I felt, chagrin at not knowing Nonie-was-*always*-bad, was always-this-bad, at having forgotten anything like this could happen, that life can get to be this bad.

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Always doesn't mean every minute to a child but simply an attempt to express a recognition that this happens sometimes, more than once, that if one is not obdurate—and unaffectionate—things come to this.

I can remember, when the stick withdrew—between feints—a crazy resurgence of pride, even though I was in pain, a crazy dismissal of the pain, at least partly, and of the above, replacing by a lunatic semi-swagger, a baby's swagger of she-has-to-like-me: now-this-will-end: I would look at her—and at the stick only obliquely—with a stiffish, backward-leaning babyish *calm*—and disbelief: a child doing that: you-have-to-stop-now-and-be-charmed-by-me.

It was the pride, the distance between me and the real abyss, that made her feel failure, a girl's impatience of it-is-not-tidy-yet.

The stick approached.

My skin winced.

The stick continued to approach.

There was a brief, huge moment, dilated with the disbelief, the sudden vision that the disbelief was misplaced; one is so astounded, the correction is so immense—when one knew the stick had passed a line, and was going to strike, or might strike: it was all a set of circles, of an unspoken *Oh*, of vision as through a telescope (not a binoculars), of rising through the oval or circular limit of sleeping consciousness to wakefulness: this painful and startling expansion of the self was in part the painful and startling expansion of openings to pain. A newborn infant perhaps has no senses: or they are barely used. Just so for a moment, a second, I had none, only agony.

Nonie was a *floor*—the air was a tree trunk: do-you-remember-rough-tree-bark-and-being-pushed-or-falling-against-it?—it was almost as if I asked myself that. The sense of agency, of confusion about the nature of existence, of possibilities, of the obduracy of this and that (including of oneself) saw nothing, saw everything—Nonie, her grasp of the stick, the trellis—saw it not through the eye but as part of the enormous expansion of all the sensory world as it changed its quality to entire loss and pain: later, it could be interpreted: now it simply hurt.

It is possible that I had moved, that I had twitched, and thereupon happened onto the blow.

But one knew she'd-done-it.

The stick struck me. The skin is thinly stretched over bone on the

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forehead: the eyebrow of a child is twitchy: the eyesocket, the eye are quick to close, to squint. Disbelief—(Nonie is a floor, is not *human*: then finally anger and rage and hurt: *she hit me*)—continued, without a seam, into vertigo, not a clean vertigo: one was at the edge of a fall into crawling slime.

It could have been a mistaken notion of what the *air* had turned into: a return to some earlier-in-childhood sense of severe or extreme pain—a sense of the roughness and foreignness of the air, as after birth, maybe. My comfort had been entirely destroyed.

Some children learn quite early to live as hawks, to circle and be cold, to stride as best they can on their short legs.

Others have a more complicated relationship to pain-in-the-world: they stride as a bluff, safe in their charm or in their hardness: they are vulnerable then so that pain, destruction seem entirely instructive.

I was already sufficiently old—four, I'd say—to resent and to be reluctant to permit, the baby in me to reemerge: a certain casting back in time, to an earlier self, was something I resisted as best I could.

Perhaps too I did it to taunt *her*—to resist the coercion of *the floor.*

I did not shrivel up, or scream—later, I learned, as a tactic, to yowl at once, to overact, to suggest immediate death, that my death was at hand.

But now I held the posture of pride, pride in a tableau: you-have-not-broken-me: I-can-still-rebuke-you.

The stick entered the eyesocket, the shallow, childish cup of bone around the soft eye. My mouth opened wide.

My scream (and perhaps what I looked like) immediately changed the game, the atmosphere, the meaning: my scream tore Nonie open: or shoved a scream out of her: what she yelled was, "YOU MADE ME DO IT!"

She also yelled, "YOU WALKED INTO IT! YOU DID IT ON PURPOSE!"

It is possible that she was biologically geared to be a lookout for a herd of animals, to see and be frightened and to shout, to change at once; and I was geared to be a hunter, to receive blows and ignore them while attacking game. It is, of course, hard to say.

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She was, however, now defending herself, the family, against the false accusation of my struck eye, of my scream: she was in a sense—and briefly—morally hysterical: to punish me, to fend me off, she struck me a third time.

With the stick.

When I'd screamed, I'd lifted my head—I mean I bent it upward. She may have meant to strike the eye again but she got the nostril—there was a shoving disarrangement of the center of my face and a squishing-squashing woodeny noise.

Part of her *experiment* was a dabbling, so to speak, in delivering a blow in the masculine style—but she hadn't taken on masculine attributes: she had hit me as a girl—it was a little like being underwater and watching someone stick a stick into the water and poke at you: there is a mask, a shield of refraction: the refraction in this case led to her being a floor, a masked girl dabbling.

But her identity, for me, was packed full of history: another girl, that is, if Nonie had been a different sort of girl, a witty one, a laugher: and had done this, the meaning of the blows would have been different: her innocence would have been proportional to her, oh, worth-to-me: it would have been almost a percentage, a twenty-five percent guilt, a lesser horror.

But Nonie was not valuable to me as a person unless she made an effort to be nice to me—or if not an effort, so long as she was drawn to me, or needed me.

Now she had dabbled—I would have felt another girl had not meant to hit me: but in this case, it was *Nonie hit me*. My sense of her guilt was total, was absolute.

Absolute? Only in a sense. The initial emotion was partly like a blow by a pipe swathed in cloth—of it-was-impossible-she-should-hit-me, this-had-not-happened.

The sudden accession of shock, the physical shock, the anesthesia, perhaps brought on the mental shock, the sense of impossibility, and its moral tone: the impossible is either magic or a dream.

We need logic so desperately that the unlikely is always in effect seriously criminal. The more unlikely something is, the more it swells into a grandeur of wickedness as the Calvinists thought.

The thick petals of galling sensation and of numbness, of half-

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sickness, of darkness were as innocent and ignorant as any flower, a blossoming of darkness. I did not live among people who thought pain was inevitable: pain has not been unmanageably ubiquitous for years.

I was already middle class and modern, in a sense; and I expected an immediate cure: I expected this not to have happened, to be untrue.

But at the same time, there was—there is only the faintest hope the pain will stop now, stop at once, there is very little chance that this isn't bad, isn't really bad, isn't real.

An odd, spareless, timeless almost floating, circling, a gradual descent occurred, to lightlessness: a descent from, a dissent from time: this is unbearable, this endless greasy slide.

It hurts—only a little—but it hurts enough so that there is nothing now but resignation or helplessness toward this slow discovery of just how much it hurts.

Around this clouded waiting or ignorance, is now a dull memory of the series of thumps, I *hear* them now, notice them only now: I felt them then: I feel their consequences now—the times are mixed up, of the noises, the wood-and-squashing noises, and those of the nerves jumping around; the sounds continue, sickeningly: the memory is stuck, wetly, fibrously, in my consciousness.

I see, out my eyes, in flickers, Nonie, Nonie's face, *flesh-colored*: mostly I see a gray foggy wad, a dirty cotton wad that has been jammed (it seems) into my eyes or eyesockets, into the eyes themselves: a damp oppressive grayness: there is no color (colors are a special treat of well-being). My lips are supernaturally dry. In my gullet the air drags.

All at once, there is something like a gasping, of swollen, terrified, hysterical *tissue*—but this is buried, shovelled under by some hunter's madness in me: I think, I would expect boys and girls to die differently.

A child has an inexact fear of death, a wordless is-this-death in the way a child says is-this-the-circus?

Animals in a ring.

I am about to give birth—to death.

Sensations push in and out and in all directions in me: I am full: I am a plenum of sensation: I am swollen with nausea, with self-abandonment, with *I will let go*, not as words, but like opening my fists: I will not resist anything: anything can emerge from me, be taken

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from me—I suppose, too, anything could be put into me.

There was a simultaneous rush of unforgiveness, forever incurable.

Thin, underlying currents and spasms of fear and violence passed beneath the resignation, the letting-go, the willed surrender (which had an unwilled part as well).

Perhaps it would be accurate to say my pain made itself more and more known to me.

It is not metaphorical or a figure of speech or a conceit to say that as that knowledge grew to occupy the center and the periphery of my attention, whatever else I knew seemed unimportant, and was, in a geographical sense, forgotten: that is, there was no room for it in my attention.

My name, the value of daylight, the assurance of any logic besides that of a short statement such as *I hurt*, are gone, are worthless. There is a stew in me, meaty, acid, of unswallowable present consciousness of being deep inside the realities, the boundaries, of pain: this stretches forward and backward without interruption or memory or hope of another state: this is, as I said, the pain continuum.

The nerves are lunatic more and more: with hardness, flights, stirrings, yowlings, heats, softness (a rottenness), ignorance.

This is what she wanted.

The actuality of internal disorder is of another life: nothing here is *right* except one's own painlessness—or death: the cessation of consciousness. Pain does not have to be charted unless one is determined to escape: and then it is charted only so that one can find a way to its edge in order to see the world again. If a woman is watchfulness itself, perhaps then pain is worse for her. So far as I have experienced my life, a man does not have to notice or understand or observe or map his pain. He tries to function, and if he cannot function, he is as good as dead: pain kills him early in a way.

Everything in me is wrong: everything in me gives off screechings, thumpings, everything is muffled and shuffling maloccurrences, forbidden stretchings, distensions, ill-advised compressions—bruisings, knottings—everything bears down and on the self, shrinks and leaves a sore hollow: one gags everywhere, inside oneself, from surfeit, from emptiness. The distance from here to painlessness is astronomical.

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I cannot cross such distances, they are so great.

Maybe I will be here forever. I am as good as dead. I start to cry.

I did function somewhat. I managed to get my vision past the gray wadding stuffed into my eyes: I sensed Nonie's staring—her disgust, satisfaction—which was hateful—her victory and her *staring*.

I raise my hand to my face. This sense of Nonie's looking at me, this purposeful, slow, frightened, uneasy movement of my hand, my not fainting means I am existing in the pain continuum—means I am dead only in a way, I am only in part a ghost.

It may perhaps be deeply insulting to the identity that one learns to live in pain, as in filth or poverty.

I raised my hand to my face. I realized that in the clutter of general pain there was a fearsome tepid trickling, threads and patches of creepy semi-heat on my face, on my lips: silly sidling sliding crawling fragilities and tiny pools: a furtive wormy end-of-life.

I touched it with my hand.

I must have known what it was but I doubted.

I looked at my hand: my vision was wadded and gray, with speckles of clarity: I saw still glistening gray threads, spottedly red; but I couldn't really see color: I saw gouts, heavy, tear-shaped drops.

Ah, now, the fantastic wrongness of everything in me is capped by a coldish fear—because of the blood. The sickness of spatial lostness, of where-am-I, where-am-I, that disorientation, now lay beneath a cold, specialized fear: flowing sheets and shiftings of cold—of cold resignation. I move my arms but only slightly: I move them to free myself from those cold sheets: but they are not to be displaced; those sheets.

It is blood. It is blood.

Something full-sized blunders through me: there is a stink—as of an elephant's passage in a narrow corridor: a smothering and a stink. Nothing in me is of quite the same importance as blood.

Pain is lesser than blood.

All at once, bravery becomes different: bravery becomes I-will-bear-this-filth-and-filth-to-come.

It is as if there was no help now. I am walking: I am going for help—but it is an icy formality, this pursuit of—help. There will be other pains, an entire medical sequence which will not end with the rasp of bandages on sewn soreness. Convulsions from antibiotics, sickly sleep, the stomach-turning waking to the smell of antiseptic—nausea

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will be inflated over and over. Blood is the boundary of a special seriousness. Or unseriousness: a silliness of constantly introduced new dislocations, wavering spacelessness (one is imprisoned), faintings, weaknesses, blackings-out, continual and spasmodic imbalances, wrongnesses: there is even an itching which is *illness*—which is sickening and which enduces despair.

One is crazed, dull-headed, resigned, human.

Nonie utters a birdlike shriek, she throws one arm up into the air, she passes out.

I make an odd, loud breathing noise—I don't know.

I go in search of what comfort there is for me now.

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## Christina Stead

# UNCLE MORGAN AT THE NATS

"You may notice the noise I am making," said Uncle Morgan, champing with his jaws. "You know what I have told you: masticate, denticate, chump, chew, and swallow. Now all together, masticate, denticate, chump, chew, AND swallow."

The five children chumped, chewed, and swallowed in rhythm with pleasure. There was a loud noise like a hippopotamus eating sugarcane.

"That loud noise," said Uncle, "is a healthy noise and if you were in some countries, they would take it as a compliment, that you were pleased with the food; and you would be obliged to smack your lips, smack your bellies, and belch; and in fact," he said, becoming excited, "explode with greed and satisfaction in all directions, ears, eyes, nose, mouth, belly, and lower down. We will now smack our lips, roll our eyes, shake our ears, heave with our lungs, and belch if we can. Those who can't belch must try. It relieves the stomach of gases which accumulate and which if not relieved will go down lower, ro-oll around the large and the small intestines and rumble in the rumble-seat."

The children broke out into cries, chuckles, and guffaws. Aunt Mildred rolled her black eyes in revolt. Her beautiful, black-fringed eyes rolled in her thin, yellow face, she shut her purplish red lips and with a look of disgust went out to the kitchen.

The orgy degenerated into horseplay, which Uncle Morgan took in hand. "Enough," he commanded, "Gilbert the Filbert!"

"Morgan the Gorgon," answered Gilbert cheekily but with his

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charming little grin. Morgan relaxed and sent a sparkling blue glance to the boy.

"Now when I was young I had digestive troubles," pursued Uncle Morgan, with an agreeable air. "I was a vegetarian, I wrongly believed that it was meat that upset me. Never say I don't change my mind. When facts present themselves to me, I change my mind. If I like the taste. In this case it was a meat-stew brought to a Nat's picnic by a lovely, serious young woman, who admired your Uncle Morgan. I did not know it then; I was too serious."

"It was my friend Nellie," said Morgan's younger sister, Beatrix, "you were keeping company."

Morgan passed this over, "Morgan has never been known to ignore a fact. Aunt Mildred he MAY ignore when she is in one of her whimsies and whim-men have whimsies; Aunt Beatrix he MAY ignore when she forgets to collect the porridge plates—" Beatrix got up hastily "—and when her hair is sticking up—"

"Now, Morgan," began Beatrix with chatty ire, "you have twisted your own hair into horns, into yellow horns." This was a habit of Uncle Morgan's.

The children looked at the horns but did not laugh; but Aunt Beatrix giggled and her timid, little, brown-haired, three-year-old daughter, Renee, broke down and giggled too. It was pretty to see how her round face changed, broke, mottled, dimpled, shifted, as she bent her head down, bashfully.

"Now, Grandmother," said Morgan, gravely addressing the three-year-old.

Her eyes shone, she flushed.

"Now, Grandmother," he said ominously, "will you do everything your Uncle Morgan tells you? Do you love your Uncle Morgan?"

"Yes," she piped.

"Then," he said looking gravely at her, "put your hand in the fire for your Uncle Morgan. Will you, Grandmother?"

This was before Uncle Morgan took down the chimney and dug out the fireplace, to avoid fire risks; and at that moment, half the breakfast fire was still blazing away in the grate, behind Aunt Mildred's armchair. Renee (Grandmother) looked from her uncle to her mother; she paled.

"Grandmother?" he said sternly.

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"Will you, Gilbert the Filbert?" he enquired.

"No," said Gilbert.

"But Grandmother *will*!" said Uncle Morgan gravely. "Grandmother, get down from your chair!" She slipped off her chair and leaned over the seat, her face already working; but she did not dare to cry yet.

"Morgan, don't be so stupid," said Beatrix.

"I mean it," he said instantly, "Trixie, I am training the child to obey, I know what I am doing. Leave it to me."

She waited.

"Grandmother, go to the grate."

She tottered away from the chair, looked at her mother; she was crying now, but not loudly.

"Go to the grate and stand in front of the fire."

She did so.

Her mother looked at her and said gently, "Don't cry, my lamb. It's only fun."

"Grandmother," said Uncle Morgan, "this is one of the most serious moments of your life. You are now learning something that will affect your whole life."

"Morgan," burst out Beatrix, "how can you tease the baby?"

"Grandmother is not a baby," said Morgan. "Grandmother! Put your hand in the fire."

She was sobbing loudly now, but she bent forward slowly and held out her pudgy hand with one fat finger advanced.

A thunderbolt tore into the room from the kitchen, the curtains blew about. Aunt Mildred, blazing black fury, was there.

"Morgan," she shouted, "how dare you tease the children!"

Uncle Morgan lifted the milk jug off the table and with a sweet laugh, parting his lips and showing many of his white teeth, he made as if to hurl the jug at Mildred.

"Let's see if I can land it right on her nose," said he.

Aunt Mildred rushed forward and Aunt Beatrix rose to her feet. There was confusion. Morgan sat there, sanguine, grinning. "Down, women!" said he, putting down the milk jug.

"You see," he remarked in a pathetic, gentle tone to the children, "when a child is getting social training, when its character is being formed, the women interfere and ruin its character. Now my

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character fortunately was not ruined, because my mother was a stern old Methody woman, good, loving but firm—''

''She was our mother too, Morgan,'' said Beatrix, ''and she made me promise to obey those rules she believed in and which have kept me straight and true ever since.''

Aunt Mildred was now retiring to the kitchen and Beatrix said, ''Come here, lamb, to its mother.'' But Morgan instantly changing his tune, commanded, ''Grandmother, back to the fire! You have not done what I told you.''

''Oh, Morgan,'' said Beatrix.

''And you, Beatrix, don't butt in,'' he said rudely, ''ideas come before sentiment. Granny,'' he began in an ingratiating drone, ''do what your little Uncle asks, Granny, your little Uncle is asking you. Granny, do what oo is told! Granny be a dood girl. Granny, put your hand in the fire for Uncle Morg!''

Trembling and weeping the child put her hand out, felt the heat that surrounds the flame, blindly weeping, unquestioning, while Uncle Morgan ducking his head and grinning whispered to left and right, ''She'll do it,'' gleefully, ''Granny will do it!''

''Renee!'' shrieked her mother and fell on the baby, pulling the poor thing from the fire.

''She touched the fire, she touched the fire,'' the children shouted, jubilating, dismayed.

''Granny did not al-to-gether touch the fire, Granny let her Uncle down, Granny did not obey her Uncle,'' said Morgan, in a repulsive, weeping tone.

Aunt Mildred was marching up and down the cemented kitchen floor with her arms folded, her eyes black. She stared through the window like a witch and if the crooked, smooth, silver arms of the fig trees had been broomsticks, she would have flown off on them.

Aunt Beatrix, weeping with her child, rushed into the kitchen to Aunt Mildred. ''Mildred! My poor fatherless baby!''

''You're a pack of fools, all of you,'' said Mildred.

She went into the boys' room next to the kitchen and started throwing the mattresses about in a rage. Beatrix sat down on the rickety kitchen chair and began combing Granny's soft, curly brown hair. She soon smiled, her eyes rounded and shone and she whispered. ''Uncle Morgan didn't mean you to do it, love, Uncle Morg was having fun,

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Uncle Morg loves you, darling."

Aunt Mildred could be heard hissing. She turned the mattress with such a thump that the iron bedstead of Sid, her eldest, slid halfway across the cement floor bringing to light Sid's heterogeneous collections and also a board he had cut loose in the wall to make a secret cupboard. Aunt Mildred surveyed this with contempt, pushed the bed back and muttered, "What a pack!"

In the breakfast room, Uncle Morgan was saying cheerfully, "But all this interrupted what I was going to tell you about the Nats' Dinner."

The Nats were the Naturalists. The night before they had had their annual dinner and Uncle Morgan had not been reelected Chairman. They had instead made a rule, the week before, saying that no chairman should serve more than two terms consecutively; and Uncle Morgan had already served three. He felt injured. At the same time, he held the Nats in contempt for having to pass a new law to get rid of him.

"At the Nats' Dinner, Ratty Atty," by which he referred to Mr. Atkinson, a lively naturalist, tall, thin, dark, whom he regarded as a rival (though of no account), "was in the chair and sat at the head of the table, so that your Uncle Morgan—"

"—Morgan the Organ," contributed Gilbert the Filbert.

Uncle Morgan smiled in the corner of his mouth, not wishing to acknowledge this hit, but proud of it, "—had to sit at the side of the banquet table; and since I am left-handed," he said, illustrating with knife and fork, "I was inconvenienced; and my right-hand and left-hand neighbors were also inconvenienced. When I eat, I cut with my left hand and my elbow sticks into my neighbor's elbow or his side or shoulder, or his eye, it depends on his size," said Uncle Morgan with a spiteful twinkle, for he was tall, large, and strong, "and the eating rhythm of the table is disturbed, whereas when I am Chairman, if my arm moves to left or right, no one is disturbed.

"Last night I was sitting by a lady, it is true she was only an old schoolteacher with a bun, but a very fine women, a woman of intellect, who admires your Uncle Morgan—" he continued with a marvellous genial expression of malice, for Aunts Mildred and Beatrix were not women of intellect, but read the bestsellers and the women's magazines; and Aunt Mildred called intellectual talk "snobbish talk by gasmen," while Aunt Beatrix did not listen at all, only waiting to

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"chip in," as she herself said.

"—and because my right arm was only holding the fork and her sharp elbow was coming my way; in fact, she was continually nudging me in the elbow!—because my elbow stuck out to wrestle with a tough bit of gristle and I made the fork twang and the plate whistle, and her elbow would be poked out as she went for a juicy tendon, for it was prime wether mutton about fifteen years old, though not so old as Miss Wetherby and perhaps that is why he bought wether, or I don't know whether. And on my other side, was Miss Rosemary Atkinson, Ratty Atty's daughter, beautiful as a rose, so that when the old lady with the bun jabbed my elbow and I jabbed hers, my chop skittered across my plate on to Sweet Rosemary's plate and I had to fly after it with my fork and we both said at the same time, 'Not much chop!' and laughed. But it was difficult for your Uncle Morgan to laugh because at that identical moment I had in the side of my cheek, my right cheek, on her side that is, a large ball of half-chewed tendon and gristle, with a little bit of bone in the middle. I didn't want to swallow the bone, and I didn't want to spit it out, so I had embedded it in a ball of refuse, muchas the dung beetle builds up his precious hoard from droppings, and I could smile but I could hardly speak. I carried that ball about in my mouth for an hour after dinner and it was only when I was walking in the back of the house, in the conservatory with Lady Wassail and she asked me, "What is the name of that little plant with the heartshaped leaves, Mr. Jackstraw?" that I could turn round, while pretending to look, and could rid myself of the downy greyish ball. For by now, it had been completely chewed up and also had bits of salad and strawberry in it. For a whole hour I had been rolling that ball between my plate and my tongue and cheek."

"What plant was it, Uncle?" said Gilbert.

"Of course she knew, she just asked to please me, to get my attention. It was *Orosera rotundifolia*, a sundew," said Morgan carelessly.

"Another thing, when I am President and hence Chairman of the Nats and sit at the head of the table, no one can hear my plate clicking. Your poor Uncle Morg—"

"Morg the Dorg," said Gilbert who had been only waiting for this.

"—Morgan," said Uncle Morgan firmly, "no matter what certain smarties who think themselves very witty may say," (Gilbert the

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Filbert grinned conceitedly), "was a very poor boy and is an autodidact, that is to say, he gained his education at night school and in the Library of Life and also of Knife."

This was greeted with the usual appreciation and he proceeded, "And Morgan Jackstraw did not have the chance you children have; hence he had to have his teeth out by the roots, when they could have been stopped from going, but they went."

He smiled at the titter and continued, "And I who am a natural speaker and have great natural charm, especially with the ladies; and with any men and boys," he turned an eye on the boys, "who believe in reason, logic, the true, the beautiful, was obliged to learn to speak through impedimenta, the impediment of my ivories. They click. You children know that however poor the fare at home, for a man like me, who has eaten in the company of lords and magnates," (he said, ridiculing himself), "I prefer to eat at home, because I can click at ease." He clicked not only at ease but demonstratively and went through a series of denture acrobatics, wobbling, tossing, clicking, and pretending to shoot his plates out on the table. "Plates to the plate," said he. The children greeted this with a roar of laughter, while Aunt Mildred, rushing through the room, groaned and tossed her head. He replaced his dentures with a lick of his agile tongue.

"Lady Wassail then asked me the name of another plant, which incidentally was a *Hardenbergia Sydniensis*. I believe, children, that she feels for your Uncle Morg. She told me something I could quite agree with," he said artfully, "that she did not enjoy this banquet anything like the last two, for she loves to see me shining at the head of the table. 'The head is my natural element,' I said to her modestly. At which she tittered. For your Uncle Morg," he said mournfully, looking round the table and especially at Renee, "may not be appreciated by Lilliputians at home; but many is the beautiful woman who has wanted to run her long slender fingers through his golden hair. Your Aunt Mildred may pretend to be in tantrums, but time was when she used to sit and dream over your Uncle Morgan's golden hair."

At this grotesque idea, the children burst into laughter. Uncle Morgan shook his head sadly, "*Tempus he fugit*," he said. "You kids have no idea how I was as a boy. You girls have no idea. Trixie there has an idea; but you don't know now, with my beard getting rough, my plate clicking, my catarrh, my digestive troubles, my appendix, my photophobia, my antrum, my torticollis, the pain in the small of my back, all of which I fight bravely, what I was like as a boy, a young god;

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only that there aren't gods; but man is a god. Ah, kids, you missed me as a boy. When I went to work, a boy there named Nunneally, I was thirteen, he was seventeen, used to stroke my arms and say 'Like satin, Morg, like white satin, like a duchess!' "

Beatrix giggled and then seeing her brother's astonished eye on her, she said apologetically, "Yes, Morg, you were a handsome boy and with such a dreamy look as if you were too good for this world."

"And so I was," he assented, "I was too good for the world, I didn't know there were evil men; I thought, if I was good, people would be good to me. But you see, kids, what happens? The Nats," he said lugubriously, "the Nats do not see me as I am. Can I blame them? They are naturalists but also men, and men have failings. Well, let me tell you, these dinners are an ordeal for a sensitive man, but next year Ratty Atty will have to vacate the seat and you will see the Padrone Morgan, the Patroon, at the head of the banquet table."

"Morgan," cried Beatrix breathlessly, "do you know what I dreamed last night? I dreamed I was at the dentist's and he put out his tongue—"

"When I am going to have trouble, I dream of a yellow-bellied sea eagle; he comes to warn me." said Morgan.

"Mowed down by a bird of ill-omen," said Beatrix rushing to get in, "and the funny thing is that though I knew it was Nell, I kept calling her Mrs. File—"

"The sausages are burning, Trix," called Aunt Mildred sourly.

"Yes, Millie dear," said Trixie eagerly, "and I woke up and it came to me out of a blue sky—"

"—in the middle of the night," contributed Gilbert.

"The sausages are burned to a cinder," said Aunt Mildred glaring.

"Trixie's cooking is a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night," said Uncle Morgan.

"And the dentist scratched my stocking and the funny thing is there is a run in my stocking."

"Those are my stockings," said Aunt Mildred.

"Mill's stockings are on Trix's last legs," said Uncle Morgan.

Trixie brought in the sausages. It was Sunday. The children did not have to get ready for school.

"I adore Sunday," said Trixie, and sang.

The kitchen became full of her sprightly chatter, the clash of dishes, and her gay soprano. Uncle Morgan had retired to the cane lounge where he lay at full length, "expatiating," as he said.

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# AMERICA AND ENGLAND

**Robert Lekachman**

## CAPITALISM: THE END OF THE JOURNEY

EDITORS' NOTE: *The following pieces by Robert Lekachman and Lewis Coser are part of a continuing series of comments on the political and economic crisis in America and Western Europe.*

By now it is probably plain to everybody but professional economists that October 1973 marked the conclusion of an unusual quarter century of détente in the relationships of labor and capital, rich and poor, in the advanced capitalist societies of Western Europe, North America, and Japan. In all of these countries, though most grudgingly in our own, politicians promised and (astonishingly) delivered more generous old-age pensions, subsidized health care, public housing, and unemployment benefits. Exorcising traditional fears of mass unemployment, all governments pledged themselves—the United States once again least wholeheartedly—to the maintenance of full employment. The durable heritage of keynesian economics was to be found in this nearly universal political assumption that governments were electorally responsible for running the industrial machinery at nearly maximum speed nearly all the time. Under the new rules, parliamentary leaders could survive only brief and shallow recessions.

After World War II, these successes of capitalism were facilitated under the terms of a social contract at once implicit and fragile. By common consent, corporations and unions tacitly agreed to refrain from serious attempts to alter existing distributions of income, wealth, and power, at least so long as rapid economic growth simultaneously financed more social services and annual gains in real income for both capitalists and their employees. As time passed, blue- and white-collar workers gained confidence that the horrors of the

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1930s would never again be repeated. Everybody, except for such traditional American losers as blacks and Puerto Ricans, got something valuable out of the annual dividend of economic growth. Prizes for all!

The postwar climate of diminished class warfare compelled radical unions and socialist parties in Europe and Japan to scrap or soften earlier programmatic emphases on redistributive taxation, nationalization of private enterprise, and confiscatory inheritance levies. It was perhaps a sign of the times that according to the wisdom of the polls, George McGovern lost votes among factory operatives and their wives by advocating redistributive negative income taxes and serious levies upon inheritance. Daniel Bell's celebrated speculations during the Eisenhower period concerning the end of ideology were a generalization from the observed decline in the capacity of Marxism as a fighting faith to attract mass support in parliamentary democracies. Save in England, a special case, unions began to move in the direction of strictly limited business objectives—more money, shorter hours, and new fringe benefits, that since the era of Samuel Gompers have comprised the program of the official American labor movement.

England's Labour party and Germany's Social Democrats discovered that it was expedient if not essential that much traditional ideological baggage be discarded. The electoral record seemed to prove that before working class voters consented to place Harold Wilson and Willy Brandt at the head of their respective political tables, they demanded plausible reassurance that government by the "left" would entail no disconcerting alterations in the arrangements which generated floods of cars, appliances, and package tours of Spain and Italy.

This generation of comparative social harmony was based upon the reality, validated in rising paychecks, of dependable, long-term economic growth. In Japan and West Germany, the process of post-war reconstruction stimulated prosperity. So did the injection of Marshall Plan aid and the movement of American capital into the Common Market. Banking and budgetary policy were equally supportive of good times. The Federal Reserve and the central banks of other countries quietly agreed to validate dollar claims against gross national product slightly in excess of their economies' capacity to spew out new goods and services at current prices. Although corporate profit targets and union wage claims added to totals one,

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two, or three percent larger than perfect price stability allowed, the situation was manageable so long as the central bankers printed additional money and supplied additional credit to consumers and corporations. Nearly every organized group got what it sought in dollar terms and only slightly less than it hoped in real purchasing power. The slight inflationary tilt imparted to prices was tolerable to consumers and actually encouraging to merchants and manufacturers who customarily prefer, for obvious reasons, rising to falling prices.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the industrialized West (including Japan) enjoyed still another blessing. The terms of trade—the ratio of export to import prices—were persistently favorable to the developed countries. Raw material producers in the Middle East, Africa, Malaysia, and Latin America sold oil, tin, rubber, coffee, copper, chrome, bananas, uranium, cocoa, and bauxite at low prices to their major customers in the West. Frequently, the customers were able to place in the bargaining scales threats of military or covert intervention against radical, nationalistic, or simply greedy politicians who sought better deals. CIA-sponsored coups against the Mossadegh government in Iran and the Arbenz regime in Guatemala signaled the power of industrial buyers over the sellers of mere raw materials.

For their part, the West sold machines, computers, gadgets, and appliances to the developing nations at high prices arranged by well-organized cartels, shared monopolies, and oligopolies. One of the reasons Europeans and Americans got richer was that the Third World remained poor. One needn't embrace Idi Amin, General Pinochet, Hafiz Assad, or other noisome Third World types, much less endorse Arab assaults upon Israel, to recognize that in the commodity producing lands a strong and substantially justified emotion of historical grievance is at work.

And, as so often has occurred, domestic harmony was promoted by the convenient presence of an external threat: the Cold War menace of the Soviet Union. The reliable threat from the East united Western Europe and the United States in the NATO alliance, facilitated the invention of the European Economic Community, and kept healthy a huge American arms industry. Even before the Yom Kippur war, this political support to Western harmony was weakened by American electoral exigencies, for however spurious détente is

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daily proving to be, Nixon's 1972 visit to Moscow sharply devalued the credibility of the Russian threat to the political independence of Western Europe and drastically increased Congressional resistance to Pentagon budgetary escalation.

No doubt Western prosperity could have survived détente, particularly if trade with Russia dramatically increased. OPEC's five-fold increase in petroleum charges proved to be another matter. In 1975 the probable balance of payments surplus of the cartel countries will approximate $50 billion. It is likely that North America, Japan, and the Common Market will be in rough balance of payments equilibrium and substantial merchandise surplus with OPEC, although it is worth emphasizing that the balance is attained by shipping directly or indirectly to the OPEC bloc merchandise which otherwise would be available to maintain or raise living standards in oil importing countries.

The condition of the Fourth World, poor societies unblessed by oil, is far more desperate. Their 1975 balance of payments deficit of $35 billion substantially exceeds foreign aid and loans from all sources. Thus it is that OPEC's spectacular triumphs have aggravated (though not caused) a global crisis of development. "It is now clear," recently observed Hollis Chenery of the World Bank, "that more than a decade of rapid growth in underdeveloped countries has been of little or no benefit to perhaps a third of the population," for, continued Chenery, "Although the average per capita income of the Third World has increased by fifty percent since 1960, this growth has been very unequally distributed among countries, regions within countries, and socio-economic groups." It is worth quoting this impeccably respectable expert a trifle further:

> Recent evidence confirms earlier speculations that in the early stages of development the distribution of income tends to become more concentrated. Increases in output come disproportionately from relatively small modern sectors of primary production and industry, which absorb a high proportion of total investment and have relatively high rates of productivity growth. This pattern of concentrated growth is perpetuated by limited access to land, credit, education, and modern-sector employment, and is often reinforced, unintentionally or otherwise, by the government's fiscal and trade policies as well as the distribution of public expenditures.

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In the proper, nonemotive tones of respectable economics, Chenery identifies one of three interlocked contemporary crises of income and wealth distribution—the misallocation of resources within developing communities. Translated into blunter language, Chenery's conclusions record the failure of Western-style economic development in much of Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Flourishing alliances between authoritarian regimes and multinational corporations have simply promoted the sort of enclave industrialization or raw material extraction which enriches small indigenous military, commercial, and political élites, as well as the stockholders of global corporation, but does amazingly little for the impoverished masses. This somber generalization holds true even for such relatively "successful" instances of development as Brazil, South Korea, and Taiwan.

The second crisis of redistribution centers upon relations between raw material producers and raw material importers. OPEC has predictably sparked envy and emulation among producers of other raw materials important to the economic health of the affluent. Although for a number of reasons, geographic and economic, no other cartel has yet fared nearly as well as OPEC, there is no question that attempts to organize tighter cartels in tin, bauxite, and other materials will continue. Nor is there any doubt that in the forums of the United Nations, the negotiations of international economic agencies, and the competitive bidding for secure supplies and political influence by the Soviets, the Chinese, and ourselves, pressures will mount for the sort of commodity price agreements which generalize the practices of the OPEC cartel. The fact that most of the developing societies have been paragons of economic injustice in their internal policies is no reason at all to expect that their leaders will cease to scream for reparations from the rich countries.

Inexorable population pressure in the developing world, Russian efforts to improve the Soviet diet, and American need for foreign earnings, render it certain that food will become increasingly expensive for average families in affluent societies. Since in the perceptible future, substitutes for petroleum are likely to be exceedingly expensive, energy costs are likely to remain high. Other raw materials are fated to cost more in the 1980s than in the 1970s. Reversing themselves with a vengeance, the terms of trade between

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rich and poor nations will require the former to swap larger and larger quantities of finished goods, technology, military equipment, and managerial services to the raw-material producers. As an arithmetic result, economic growth in Europe, Japan, and North America, now practically halted by the current mini-depression, will at best resume at sharply diminished rates and at worst prove accurate the Club of Rome's prophecies of zero growth.

Hence the third crisis of redistribution is located within the rich nations. When growth slows or stops, politics and economic policy center upon the redistribution of a static national product. The British economist Rudolf Klein analyzed the resulting social struggle this way:

> Immediately the competition for resources becomes a zero-sum game. One man's prize is another man's loss. If the blacks want to improve their share of desirable goods, it can only be at the expense of whites. If the over-65s are to be given higher pensions, or improved medical services, it can only be at the expense of the working population or the young.

At least for the moment, Dr. Klein may be a touch pessimistic, for in the United States the real income of average workers has for several years steadily declined without evoking any strong political response. Still, if by mischance the electorate installs Gerald Ford or Ronald Reagan in the White House for a four-year term, the probability is that the current drift toward still greater inequality will accelerate enough to stimulate rebellion on the part of the losers.

Secretary Simon, owner of one of the better eighteenth-century minds, has agitated persistently for tax relief for stockholders and corporations. Should such pleas win Congressional hearts, this third crisis of redistribution will be "resolved" temporarily by preserving property at the expense of work incomes. The resolution could be no more than transitory for reasons that Marx identified over a century ago, when he isolated as capitalism's fatal contradiction the system's capacity to flood the market with merchandise and yet divide incomes so unequally that repetitive shortages of customers threaten to bring on crises of glut and mass unemployment.

The peculiarities of English politics have led to the opposite mode of redistributing a national product which in Great Britain

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has been growing very slowly for three decades. Some years of faster wage than price inflation have effectively redistributed considerable income from the prosperous to the unionized majority. Although the English response is more equitable than the American, it is no more viable. Capital has left England, domestic investment has declined to perilously low levels, and British unions have reluctantly agreed to slow the pace of wage inflation.

Capitalism offers no acceptable alternative strategy to rapid growth as the legitimizer of its institutions. When growth ceases, economic policy fluctuates between restraint of inflation and stimulation of employment. Incomes policy, the only way to combine high employment and stable prices, breaks down because no principle of division between wages and profits is simultaneously acceptable to owners and workers. The rash of interest among such alert members of the American business and financial establishment as Felix Rohatyn (MAC), W. Michael Blumenthal (Bendix), and Robert Roosa (Brown Brothers, Harriman) in democratic national planning amounts to recognition of the inadequacy of market processes in a time of reduced economic expansion. But planning, Japanese or French style, is no quick fix. All the hard planning issues—who plans, by what processes, for whose benefit—are as divisive as quarrels over wage and profits guidelines.

First in England and now here at home, there has been a quantity of wistful talk of a more formal social compact than the one which was dissolved by the thunder of the guns of October 1973. Apparently a version of incomes policy, the social compact is an attempt to win the agreement of organized economic groups about the fair distribution of the social product. The outlook is unpromising for arriving at a definition, let alone a means of enforcement, for such a pact. Capitalism's success in generating consumer goods has simultaneously devalued older icons of community, elevated self- and group-interest as almost exclusive motivations of action, and rendered highly unlikely the emergence of unifying political leadership. When a popular prophet of American triumphalism like Daniel Boorstin can seriously postulate the significance of consumption communities peopled by devotees of Cutty Sark, Budweiser, Total, and Alka-Seltzer Gold as paradigms of fraternity, capitalist-style, then one can only respond in Boorstin's terms: What happens when

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there is less scotch and beer? Do brotherhood and sisterhood wane?

As Marx foresaw, the relentless commercialization of religion, politics, and popular culture have converted the ties that in the past bound men and women to each other as members of communities, into so many articles of commerce. The consumer has learned to expect more each year. Since it is not in the cards that his wish will be gratified, it is exceedingly hard to envision a very long or very attractive future for market capitalism. It is equally hard to be optimistic about the shape of postcapitalist society, but that is an essay for another occasion.

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## A VIEW FROM ENGLAND

**Lewis Coser**

Writing from Britain, I may be more acutely aware of the European crisis than I would be on the continent or back home. The symptoms of that crisis are more pronounced here than elsewhere, but the underlying sickness seems to be general.

"What do you think? What do you think about England, this country of ours where no one is well?" asked W.H. Auden in *The Orators* in 1932. The poem was published at the bottom of the Great Depression when decline and decay were plain to see all over the urban and industrial landscape. This time around, the crisis is less visible even though unemployment rates are highest since the thirties, many empty storefronts can be seen on London's Oxford Street, and the British GNP translated into wealth per capita of the population, formerly near the top of the European community, has slipped toward the bottom, with only Italy and Ireland below.

The mood of the people one meets seems to swing rapidly from dyspepsia and depression to a kind of feverish gaiety. C.P. Snow's Cambridge dons now serve tiny glasses of sherry or pints of Lager; the liberal flow of Scotch of yesteryear has all but ceased. Yet they also talk enthusiastically of forthcoming vacations in Italy and Spain, though in tones that suggest they may be permitting themselves a last fling before it is too late. The unions, in a fine gesture of solidarity, decided on a boycott of Spanish goods after the recent beastliness of the Spanish dictatorship, but they already seem to have had second thoughts when they realized that such gestures might endanger the cut-rate holiday excursions to the Spanish seacoast that have become routine for the better-paid union members. Yet even the union

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members' standard of living is now declining. Supermarket customers nowadays can choose between British, German, Danish, and New Zealand butter, but all butter prices have steadily increased, along with the prices of everything else. Just like tuberculosis at an early age, inflation, though prevalent elsewhere, seems to have become a peculiarly British disease.

Retail prices in England, as the German sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf, now head of the London School of Economics, recently reminded us, fluctuated around the same level from the middle of the seventeenth century until the beginning of World War I. They reached unprecedented peaks during that war, yet later fell again to roughly the 1913 level. But after 1948, they rose annually by between three and five percent throughout the fifties and most of the sixties, with a much steeper rise thereafter. Since 1973 the annual rise has been in two-digit figures, and it now amounts to over twenty-five percent. This means that something unheard of in terms of order of magnitude and impact is happening to the British economy in the 1970s.

A creeping inflation of this scale surely must undermine the relatively stable assumptions on which British society has hitherto rested. In the fifties and up to the middle sixties, Britain, as well as the rest of Europe, revelled in unprecedented prosperity. Enough of the increasing national product seeped down to the hitherto underprivileged strata to make it possible for the Bells and Lipsets of this world to proclaim that European capitalism, gilded by a coating of welfare state planning, had finally solved the major problems of the West. The end of ideology in their view was, so to speak, the superstructural reflection of an affluence in which everybody, though to an unequal extent, had access to the great barbecue. All this now reads like a dim echo from a vanished past.

Inflation at the present scale has seriously unsettling effects on the class structure. As Dahrendorf puts it, "Inflation has become the medium of a more or less hidden redistribution struggle between those who are able to keep the pace, because of their market capacity, and those who are not; the potential of this conflict, like all concealed struggles, is nasty." Some strata, most particularly big labor and big business, have up to recently been able to live with inflation or even to increase their share of the pie. The major industrial unions, in

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particular, have managed to extract wage increases that have compensated for losses in purchasing power. They have, so to speak, exported the cost of inflation to other strata whose market capacity is weaker. By contrast, white collar strata, especially in nonunionized sectors, shopkeepers, pensioners, the retired, the inhabitants of small towns and provincial backwaters have suffered serious setbacks in their traditional standard of living.

Such reductions in living standards in a period of continuing creeping inflation are not a matter of economics alone. Decline in income, but also in savings, upsets the capacity of these people to plan rationally for their future, and it upsets their traditional standing and rank in the existing scheme of things. The welfare state, to be sure, has set a floor for the standard of living below which only certain marginal groups—recent immigrants in particular—are likely to fall. But even in this respect there are some danger signs. The national health service, for example, is in a crisis; the waiting lists at understaffed hospitals have been lengthening, and the brightest and most promising of young medical people have begun to emigrate, or at least to entertain the thought of emigration. Moreover, the bottom set by the welfare state is pretty low, much lower than the standards to which the bulk of the population has become accustomed. This is why things begin to look nasty indeed.

True, the Labour government has passed, or is about to pass, a number of worthwhile measures. Land speculation, for example, which in recent years has returned enormous profits to skilled operators, will be seriously curbed by a bill now passing through the last stages of consideration in Westminster. But as a whole, Harold Wilson's government has seemed so far to be as helpless in the face of inflation as everybody else. Wilson has now persuaded the major unions to limit their wage claims and to accept a most un-Rousseauian "social contract" of voluntary restraint. It may work, of course, but I have not met many Labour supporters who really believe that it will. Such restraints seem to me to have a chance only if there is a general sense of social solidarity, a kind of Durkheimian consensus as did exist during the war. But I see no evidence of this. On the contrary, the contentions between classes and strata seem to be more pronounced today than they have been since the Great Depression. People may no longer feel "I'm alright, Jack," but they certainly

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seem to see no reason why they should stay behind in the scramble to keep up. It's everyone, or at least every group, for itself. The ship of state isn't sinking, of course, but people try to make sure that they have a lifeboat seat. When I recently opened an account at a British bank, the manager told me, "Don't exchange too many dollars now, the pound is weak, will get weaker, and won't stabilize maybe for the next four years or so." Such advice to a visiting American, I submit, would have been considered unthinkably unpatriotic even a few years ago.

While the Labour government is supposed to muddle through until the North Sea oil—expected to redress the balance of payments and to stop the hemorrhage of the pound—begins to flow, the Labour left also muddles through and suffers from a dearth of fresh ideas. Key members of the old Left now sit on the front benches and accept, though often reluctantly, government discipline. Others have muted their criticism as the big unions, at least temporarily, have swung behind Wilson's social contract. What remains is a New Left increasingly made up of students and young professionals who talk in the jargon of Frankfort school Marxism, totally unintelligible to the average Labour Party supporter. And Ian Mikardo and the remainder of the *Tribune* group's stalwarts sound stale, clamoring that there is nothing on the British scene that further nationalizations, still higher wages, and, perhaps, import controls won't be able to cure.

The Liberals hope for greater parliamentary influence through proportional representation. But since the Tories have just unmistakenly indicated that they aren't interested, the Liberals are likely to linger on in a state of utter political and ideological confusion, trying to be all things to all men, women, and children.

The Tories, in contrast, under the guidance of their new leader, Mrs. Thatcher, have decided at their recent conference to move firmly into the nineteenth century. While Gerald Ford may not be sufficiently emphatic in his allegiance to free enterprise to please a Milton Friedman or a Senator Goldwater, the New Tories leave no doubt as to the totality of their commitment. They are shouting from the roof tops that they will no longer be an echo and that their voice will be that of unrestrained Manchesterian capitalism. One may admire the courage of this return to first principles, of unreconstructed reaction replacing the half-hearted welfare state philos-

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ophy of the recent Tory past, and yet one is likely to remain rather skeptical of its appeal to the bulk of the voting population. It would seem indeed as if the Tories are about to lose their image of *the* national party to become the standard bearers of Colonel Blimp, suburban rose gardeners, Church of England clergymen, and company directors.

No serious political alternatives seem to have appeared on the right or on the left; this accounts, perhaps, for the feeling of dyspepsia and letdown of which I spoke earlier. For the time being, people still seem to indulge in a last fling of self-indulgence in the spirit of *carpe diem*. But will this last? Can it? In the shadows there lurks the dark figure of Enoch Powell, the racist rabble-rouser from Oxbridge; and even more menacing figures may soon crawl out from under the woodwork. In the meantime, only one thing seems certain: you cannot maintain a stable democracy at a twenty-five percent rate of inflation for too much longer. To quote Dahrendorf again, "Yesterday's rising individuals are today's declining classes. And in history, groups which were worried about their future have been the stuff from which illiberal politics were made."

The editors of *Partisan Review* may feel that I have not really responded to their queries and have instead stuck to too much detail about the English scene. But I have preferred to be concrete rather than to indulge in generalizations about the crisis of the West.

You may ask whether the crisis is primarily political or economic. It seems to me that at the present time politics and economics are so intertwined that each has lost the measure of autonomy it may once have enjoyed. In an age of administered prices and declines of the market, government policies set the tone. But these policies, in turn, are constrained by the state of the economy. Even in the most unlikely event of Mrs. Thatcher's coming to power, she will have to continue to prop up ailing industries through government intervention, just like Mr. Heath and Mr. Wilson; the "socialization of the losses" will continue, no matter who sits in Whitehall. Is the crisis soluble within the present social and economic system? It all depends what these terms refer to. I do not expect a "breakdown of capitalism" along classical Marxist lines, but I also feel that the present policies of muddling through have almost come to the point of no return. Certainly, heightened class conflict and contentions for

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power can be expected in the future. I find it hard to believe that the British will allow themselves to slip into the economic conditions of, say, Greece or Spain without major upheavals. There are limits to the tradition of the stiff upper lip.

I know no more accurate diagnosis of present trends than that of Robert Lowell who recently wrote:

> We feel the machine slipping from our hands,
> As if somebody else was steering.
> If we see light at the end of the tunnel,
> It's the light of the oncoming train.

It may not yet be "closing time in the gardens of the West," but England seems to be getting there pretty fast. But then again such dire predictions, like Marx's prophecies of capitalism's doom, have frequently served as self-denying prophecies. They have stopped the fatal drift, alerted people to their perils, and finally led to a renewal of a sense of purpose and collective mastery. One can only wish that this will happen once more.

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# POEMS

## Steve Jamison

### THAT'S IT, COALTOWN

In a tent
under the darkness
the girl shouted
the names of horses.
Come on, jockeys, she said,
pull the handle
on the machine
and try to get
the ball in the red light.

She put the money
behind the gold horses
waiting to go
with the winner.
The horse I had won
was sitting on
the ground beside me,
with a small chain
to hold him by.
A red-haired boy
stood near me watching
Coaltown push to victory.

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I asked him to sit
down and race a horse
against mine
and the dollars I had
we split between us.

The man
drinking Pepsi
in the high booth
called out their names
as the horses blinked
in their lights
to the bell, and
we raced till the boy
won a horse the size of mine.
We got up and left
out of money

and the lights blinked
on behind us.
I spent my last quarters
letting him throw a pop corn ball
into lighted fish bowls
and you could keep the fish.

We went by a dart throw
where a lady with long
black hair and a cigarette
called out, Come here,
bring your little boyfriend.

She put her hands
in her apron fisted
among the coins
and behind her
a row of radios,
each gleaming with
its dials.

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Beyond us
the voice called out
their names, Windy Whisper,
Tali Sue, Iron boy
Coaltown running and running,
the people gathered at the tent
for one quarter to hear
blinking across the lighted board

golden horses
running to victory.

## Shirley Williams

### MISS ABINETHA

Mamma Ne—

even
if I never speak
her name no more I
form it in my heart
and grieve for her in
places she was the
only one to know.

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i

This the echo of
your grief not her cheek
against your face not
her laughing not her
hugging, holding hands

If I could I'd give
you her voice in a
line and hear it sound
my own self like it
used to in this room.

ii

This for me and for
you for Lena and
Honey and the kids.
Vangy gived flowers
to the living; I
told her and I know
she knowed something of
what she mean to me:

Love don't always make
life though it always
have to try, have to
help what it put in
the world find all its
own ways to survive

*Vangy: 3/25/43—12/26/74*

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## David Petruzelli

### THE HORN OF THE PAPERWEIGHT CONCH

Miles from your waves, I still listen,
The air slow as the snail I mistook you for
This morning, in the dark . . .
Only running water reached
To clean you out, but all night
I dreamt that deep inside
Dried meat still dangled by a thread—
You tried to shake it loose
By rolling back and forth across my desk
As you did before on the sand:
The time you spoke to no one,
Made a fist and years later woke;
You grew large with the sea all around you,
A pearl throbbed in you like a heart . . .

Listen you say, so I hold you,
And all you have ever heard
You hold. Like a swimmer
Who leaves the ocean and lies down,
You still feel it, the waves still working;
Miles of seaweed shrug with the surf,
Fossil starfish burn on the rocks like blaze marks.
Your breath slips back to tell yourself
*Uncoil, do not give yourself up.*

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# Two Poems by Luis Salinas

## I SALUTE THE DEAD

In this drunken town
bitten by the whores
of Texas, I pause with
a beer to salute the dead.

Someone's in my house
—the dead child of Texas
haunts the woodwork
and the child is everywhere
tonight waiting for the dawn,
tomorrow maybe playing
in the mud.

My nephew asks if the black
children he sees on TV
are the poor, and I reply,
"We are the poor."
He cannot understand,
and I know this house
is as poor as this drunken
town
and I drink my beer and
hiccup into song.

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## OLIVIA

I walk on the edge
of my mother's grave
sadly touching the rain
as if it were her dress
disguised as silk. I
wander on, a shadow
speaks as softly
as my hands
and we must leave off
where it began
the coughing
and my four year old
arms ready to please.
Mother, you would have
made the cold into fire
and your beauty the talk
of the town.
I know death like I know
you, mother,
leavened bread in the oven,
a dog,
my sister Irma,
and the neighbors
wailing like our kitchen.
I didn't come to this world
to be frightened
yet your death sticks
in my stomach
and I must clean the kitchen
with my hands
and I must wander on
into the night of leavened bread
and pursue truth
like a tube needing air.

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## M. Slotznick

### OCTOBER. TURNING

We had come to expect, after all,
a little maintenance for the souls left
vibrant among the earth's shutting-down
millwork. We were nuts . . .
After acres, last Sunday, she started
everything, running, the minutiae of autumn
unlacing from our feet into the valley,
golly, down went the chestnuts, down
went our little red bearings, please pity
a foreign industrialist's shoestring comprehension—.

Less and less hums. I remember essentially
her clarity; her sienna sketches of the hereafter;
the tick-tick of chestnut twigs splintering
into her chestnut design; and her old man
sprocketing down the slope, apparently disconnected,
after the fact, much of the time.

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## Ronald Sukenick

# THIRTEEN DIGRESSIONS

When LeRoi Jones [Baraka] introduced his 1963 anthology of contemporary fiction, *The Moderns*, by claiming descent from the Modern tradition for "the best of American twentieth century writing," it seemed to me an unquestionable premise. But now it seems clear there has been a break in that descent, and that to make it explicit and disentangle ourselves from some of the tendencies of Modernism, and especially from its attendant criticism, will clear the air. There have been unforeseen, though maybe predictable, developments. The hermeticism of the Moderns engendered, not without their implicit and, at times, explicit encouragement, a new and reductive academicism. The New Criticism, with its ideas about hypostasis, intentional fallacy, ambiguity, and withheld emotion, emphasized the hermetic side of the Moderns and attenuated the poem's connection with experience. One must sustain tension rather than achieve catharsis. Irony, highly valued as a means of control, becomes a form of suppression that chokes off libido. The hermeneutics of the New Criticism was, in part, a prophylaxis designed to protect life from the disruptive energy of art. If art is potential disease (disorder, plotlessness, idiosyncratic form, irregular versification), it follows that interpretation must be quarantine. It was in reaction to this kind of devitalization that Sontag demanded an erotics of art.

* * *

There was another and opposite side to the American Moderns that may turn out to be the most important and most native aspect of their work, though it was not picked up by the critics descending from Eliot (who now begins to seem an isolated, exceptional figure among the rest) since it contradicts their image of literature which tended toward that of a closed box. I am referring to the continuity of art and experience which is so obvious in *The Cantos;* and in the work of Williams, especially *Paterson*. It is evident in the readiness of these poets to use their own unmediated experience without the

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intervention of predetermined form, including the experience that occurs during and because of composition, on the same level as other subject matter. In Wallace Stevens one might say that this latter experience is the poem: that the poem is experience mediated only by the further experience of composition, the famous "act of the mind." This is why Stevens is confusing for amateur philosophers, who think he is seriously formulating abstractions, when he is in fact doing something more playful and far more serious—showing us how abstractions operate in experience, how they transmute, how they contradict one another, how they repeat and vary and interact with other kinds of experience, how they feel. Pound speaks of a "persona." All right. Maybe he still felt the need to fictionalize his experience as, say, Browning might in order to incorporate it into the artifice of the poem. Nevertheless, the way that Pound and Williams incorporate personal anecdotes, for example, even letters, is something new. The poem is continuous with speech, with conversation, with thought, with experience, and not a special category—except in one respect: there is an additional variable, the process of the composition of the poem, which, however, is itself continuous with experience.

* * *

It was this essentially "Redskin" attitude toward experience in a new and explicit form that blew the lid off the closed and stuffy art of the fifties, and released a flood of energy in a whole generation of creative artists. The improvisations of jazz, especially bebop, were the great example, explicitly so in Kerouac's "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose." There was Olson's 1950 "Projective Verse" essay:

> It is now only a matter of the recognition of the conventions of composition by field for us to bring into being an open verse as formal as the closed, with all its traditional advantages.

The first real explosion was abstract expressionism, which obliterated the demarcation between the painting and the experience of composing it. There was Frank O'Hara, whose poems are like casual notations of what happens as he goes along in a casual diction and flattened metric that reads quite differently from what one was used to thinking of as poetry. There was John Cage and his ideas about open-ended, chance composition, which have had enduring influence (the artist Robert Morris in 1970: "the artist has stepped aside for more of the world to enter into the art"). There was Allen Ginsberg's exploitation of his own personality in his poems. There were

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Jack Spicer and Robert Duncan on the West Coast. In the novel there were Kerouac and Burroughs. And there were many others. A poet as different from the preceding figures as A.R. Ammons is very much like them with respect to his use of experience, especially in his book-length poem, *A Tape for the Turn of the Year.* Poetic closure became relatively unimportant. Letters, journals, and collaborations became important forms. Tape recording became a significant technique in various arts—I remember the composer Steve Reich telling me the tape recorder was the characteristic medium of the decade. Improvisation was crucial (Kerouac: "Begin not from preconceived idea of what to say about image but from jewel center of interest in subject of image at *moment* of writing"). Like improvisation, collage was also crucial as a way of making fresh contact with experience. There was a more direct relation with experience as it registers on the self without the mediation of a priori form, and a correspondingly increased importance of the presence of the self in the work. One felt the need to incorporate the vagaries of experience, its randomness, its arbitrariness, to affirm the experience of composition, and to deny the work as illusion, so that while we admitted the brokenness, the discontinuity of experience, we also swept away many of the chronic schizoid Western attitudes toward mind and experience, thought and poetry, form and chaos, and we gave to our works the only structure that seemed possible or even desirable—the structure of our own minds. If another kind of structure seemed possible, it was the structure of the arbitrary, a way of moving from the meditated to the unpremeditated, as in Burrough's "cut up" method, of allowing "more of the world to enter into the art" (one notes already in Stevens this alternation between arbitrary forms and forms that reflect the dynamic of his ongoing imagination). Diane Wakoski, one of the important poets in this line, recently made the following comment on this aesthetic, which I quote while taking exception to her organic/life style:invention/craft opposition and her comment on fiction:

> Those of us writing poetry today are doing so on a series of formal premises which may be different from anything in the past. One of those premises is that the work must organically come out of the writer's life. We do not believe very much in "invented" literature any more. Or we consider it entertainment. Neither serious or interesting art. We have some difficulty dealing with the idea that a man could sit down and decide to write, say, a sonnet or a villanelle and turn out a poem that would really be interesting to anyone. Even technically or perhaps *especially* technically, because what we are interested in is how the writer reaches through the content of his life, his ideas, his emotions, and his own personality to create a form for expressing all of this. . . . We no longer accept the premise that a novelist can invent people or stories

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> without putting himself into them. We no longer believe that there is something called "the craft of poetry" which is apart from the life style of the poet. . . . I'd like to . . . make a case for the excitement in literature being an extension of the writer's life, rather than a transcending of or an escape from his reality.

Extension rather than transcendence. If we say that "content" is the writer's experience (memories, researches, readings, activities, indigestions, imaginings, neuroses, opinions, and the act of composition), then Wakoski's commentary makes perfect sense of Creeley's formulation that "form is an extension of content." The poem is not different from experience, it is more experience. If this is so then we can and should talk about poetry more like the way we talk about baseball than the way we talk about God. It might then be seen as the duty of interpretation to avoid hierophantic complications and to render itself unnecessary as it extends our experience of the poem.

* * *

It's possible that a break with what was considered literary Modernism occurred in the fifties without anyone being quite aware of it, even the writers themselves (in painting, the disruption was more explicit). Maybe the significant split on hermeticism was between Eliot and Pound on one side and Williams and Stevens (literally) on the other, though the split is more or less embodied in all these figures. The break is implicit in the distinction Olson made between Pound and Williams in the *Mayan Letters* of 1953, but this is apparently not what Olson thought he was saying:

> The primary contrast, for our purposes is, BILL: his Pat is the exact opposite of Ez's, that is, Bill HAS an emotional system which is capable of extensions & comprehensions the ego-system (the Old Deal, Ez as Cento Man here dates) is not.

In 1965 Creeley, to whom the *Letters* were written, glossed this to mean that, for Pound, "the ego or mind is made the sole measure of such experience" while "Williams offers an *emotional* system, which does not limit the context of writing to an assumption of *understanding*." It seems to me that the real difference in question is simply that between an imposed order and one that develops as it goes along—"occurs as it occurs," as Stevens would say, "by digression" as Laurence Sterne would put it, or, in terms of jazz, by improvisation. If it is true that such a way of proceeding is capable of comprehensions beyond those of the "ego-system," it may be to say that

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art is a way of thinking, that is different from and in many ways superior to abstract thinking. In any case, it is true more often than not that, in retrospect, revolutionaries revolutionize something other than what they thought they did. For example, the attempts of Williams and Olson to explain their metric never makes sense to me unless I think of them as unrecognized transition from verse that is largely oral to verse that is largely visual ("concrete")—the opposite of what they are saying.

* * *

Though I am not concerned here with literary theory, I must stress the importance of the kind of working theory that influences the process of composition. There are three theories that, in modern history, have generally governed what an artist, consciously or nonconsciously, thinks he is doing in his work: roughly in order of their appearance—though they are also obviously coexistent—they are imitation, expression, illumination. There is also a fourth idea of composition which is beginning to crystallize and to dominate the work of artists who are in touch with their contemporaneity, that I will call generation. The relation of these theories is not successive but metabolic: each digests the preceding way of organizing things into its own particular way of organizing things. Imitation is the most pervasive and most deeply embedded theory of art in our culture (though in many others it is not), particularly for the novel. It's hard to avoid. Let's take the example of two good novelists (the comments of whom I consider here, I want to add, do not necessarily reflect their creative practice). William Gass talks about fiction as an addition to reality, and Gilbert Sorrentino talks about fiction as invention. Both of these terms I would characterize as having to do with art as generation, but both writers seem at the same time encumbered in their thinking by undigested leftovers from other theories. Gass thinks of fiction as a model of the world—an idea itself modeled, probably, on the abstract schemes of reality developed in the exact sciences. But the idea of a model reintroduces the schizoid split between art and reality that one gets rid of in speaking about art as an addition to reality (as Gass does elsewhere). A model is a model of something else that is "real." A model is not real. The real is the subject of the model. The model is the form we give to the subject. This is basically a subtler kind of imitation theory in which continuity between art and experience is broken because art is seen as a mode essentially different from experience. One of the consequences of such theories is the distinction between form and content: form is justifiably seen as merely a way of formulating content, rather than as the creation of content, that is, as addition to reality. Another consequence is a literature that cannot believe in its own reality and must have constant recourse to irony and self-parody, a literature that has lost confidence in itself: Barth's "literature of exhaustion," or what critic Jerome Klinkowitz

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calls "regressive parody." Still another consequence is the desperate reintroduction of realism as media realism, stereotype: Pop Art. As if the only thing we can make of our experience is the ultimate mirror image—a photograph, a negative, a cliché.

* * *

Gilbert Sorrentino, in his essay on Williams's prose in *New American Review*, 15, strongly rejects the mimetic theory for the novel. "It does not mirror reality," he concludes of the novel. But then he immediately adds: "If it is any good at all it mirrors the processes of the real, but, being selective, makes a form that allows us to see these processes with clarity." This I see as still another variant of the idea of imitation, and in fact I think it could be argued that this version is probably much what Aristotle had in mind to begin with. Sorrentino also rejects fiction as "the expression of 'self,' " and here, with some qualification, I would agree with him. The use of the self was an important element in the kind of literature of experience that was prominent in the sixties. However, this should not be confused with that distorted scrap of the romantic tradition, commonly called "self-expression." The use of the self in such books as Steve Katz's *Exaggerations of Peter Prince* and my own *Up* was quite contrary to the doctrine of self-expression. We were not writing autobiography or confession—we were at times using those forms as ways of incorporating our experience into fiction at the same level as any other data. To quote Diane Wakoski again, this time in an interview:

> I use personal information about my life in the same way that anyone else who had a complicated body of knowledge might use it, as a structure or metaphor, a set of images for poetry.

Possibly a more important reason for using one's experience at the same level as other data was to break down the rather puritan conception of art as illusion, which, in a crude sense, is made necessary by mimetic theory (if art isn't real it must be illusion). It's a telling fact that the idea of art as realism can't do without the idea of art as illusion. Art as illusion is fundamentally a negative characterization which must then be circumvented by such awkward detours as the willing suspension of disbelief, which seems an adequate theory for children reading fairy tales but not for much else. In order to help break down the "willing suspension of disbelief" I threw in the notion of "the truth of the page." In an interview done in 1969 (published 1971) I am recorded as follows:

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> The truth of the page is that there's a writer sitting there writing the page. There's a dictum of Burroughs which goes something like "the writer shouldn't be writing anything except what's in his mind at the moment of writing," which means to me the same thing as "the truth of the page." . . . I'm not writing illusions—I'm not writing about a fantasy that I've had, if it's fantasy, but I'm having a fantasy and writing it down. In fact, the act of writing it down is part of the fantasy . . . like sleeping is part of dreaming.

If the writer is conceived, both by himself and by the reader, as "someone sitting there writing the page," illusionism becomes impossible and several advantages are gained. First, one comes closer to the truth of the situation. Second, for the writer, writing becomes continuous with the rest of his experience. Third, the writer is clearly at liberty to use whatever material comes into his head as he is writing, including the data of his own experience. Fourth, he becomes, in Wordsworth's phrase, "a man speaking to men," and therefore continuous with their experience. Fifth, the reader is prevented from being hypnotized by the illusion of that make-believe so effective in the hands of nineteenth-century novelists but which by now has become a passive, escapist habit of response to a creative work—instead he is forced to recognize the reality of the reading situation as the writer points to the reality of the writing situation, and the work, instead of allowing him to escape the truth of his own life, keeps returning him to it but, one hopes, with his own imagination activated and revitalized. To paraphrase Robbe-Grillet, the main didactic job of the contemporary novel is to teach the reader how to imagine his own life. Art is not imitation; it is example.

* * *

Henry Miller is for American novelists what Whitman is for American poets. The source of his vitality is the current that began flowing when he reconnected our art with our experience. Experience begins with the self and Miller put the self back into fiction. For a writer the whole point of literary technique is the fullest possible release of the energy of his personality into his work, and when one comes into contact with that force, the whole superstructure that one had assumed to be the point of literature begins to burn away. After Miller it was possible to gather strength from Sterne, Rabelais, Beckett—the latter's reduction of the self to the most irreducible minimum can be seen as the complementary opposite of Miller's tendency to magnification. Watt's cryptic word games which treat language as detached, autonomous, hermetic, and which can be read as a parody of Joyce, indicate a literary difference between the friends. For Beckett, however autonomous

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language may be, it is finally the last sign of the presence of identity and, if only through the act of composition, of a vestigial, irreducible, and perhaps undesirable connection with experience. In his hermeticism, Joyce is Modern; Beckett is the beginning of something else. Another way of seeing the reintroduction of the self in fiction is as an element of expressive theory, an aspect of romantic theory. In an expressive theory I take it that what is being expressed is not the self but a relation—that is, the self becomes important as a term in relation with another term: nature in *The Prelude*, for example. The second term has to do with some conception of reality, and the imagination becomes the means of uniting the self with reality. However, this works only if there are two terms to unite, and it may be that the hermeticism of the Moderns had to do with the loss of the second term. I suspect that for most contemporary artists (I mean artists who are aware of their contemporaneity) there is no conception of reality strong enough to prevent an expressive approach from lapsing into solipsism. Genet's brilliance was in sensing that the imagination could no longer unite us with reality unless it invented it to begin with.

* * *

In a situation where the notion of reality is itself up in the air, a theory of art that has to do with the illumination of reality will be seen to have obvious deficiencies. Again, Sorrentino, in his highly intelligent Williams essay, augments what is basically a mimetic theory with the theory of illumination. The novel not only "mirrors the processes of the real" but also shows us its essence, reveals its "actuality." In other words, the novel does not merely imitate, it illuminates: "the flash, the instant or cluster of meaning"—illuminating what? For many of us writing now the flash of insight reveals the void. The only kind of epiphany that can occur in the absence of a second term would be a negative epiphany. The symbolists had various conceptions of the absolute available through correspondences, and the surrealists had the unconscious via depth imagery, but generally speaking the notion of illumination seems like a doomed effort by the remnants of religious sensibility to find meaning in a secularized reality. No wonder that Narcissus was a compelling figure for the symbolists and their descendants. In such circumstances what the lamp reveals is the mirror—or nothingness, *le Néant*. Even for Joyce epiphany becomes inadequate as social reality, then culture, as the second term, dissolves in language in *Finnegans Wake*. Still, it seems to me that the idea of illumination has a certain kind of validity—as long as it is clear that revelation does not come from some source beyond ourselves, some essence that enables us to transcend our present state. It

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may be that the mind at its most illumined confronting the world at its most obscure is able to generate extensions of experience that alter and unify the field of experience itself.

* * *

"'Nature does not use *pi*' means that nature does not measure bubbles but generates them." Hugh Kenner's interpretation of Buckminster Fuller's remark (in *The Pound Era*) is wholly in the line of the open field idea of composition articulated by Williams and Olson, and within the realm of what I have called a generative theory of composition. "*Pi* will only describe a sphere once formed, and a sphere moreover idealized because static. But the generation of forms is described by vectors." To take off from there, let's say that *pi* is the point of view of art as static and measurable, as in Aristotle: form is a description of forms that already exist, and that may be transferred to works that do not yet exist. Thus, metrical scansion, traditional forms, the well-made novel. In an open field, or generative, theory of composition, the page would be a field of forces whose vectors generate the poem. There is no a priori form—form is generated by the currents of energy that interact on the page. Robbe-Grillet has spoken about the question of generation in composition, but I prefer a modification of his ideas suggested by Ricardou:

> It is the activity of writing which provokes the activity of invention in presenting it with problems, in imposing directions on it, in endlessly pushing it ahead. It is in and through the text that the text is produced.

This resembles that art of the sixties in which the mechanics of the medium produced the work, without, however, its naive ambition to substitute process for artist. In this view, the page would become a model, or better, record—not of "reality"—but of the way the mind works, the way we experience things, including the way we experience creative thought. "Mind is the regenerative part of nature," Kenner remarks further on. And, one might add, art is the regenerative part of experience as it generates new anti-entropic extensions of it that reestablish a vital connection with the data of reality in the energy field of the art work. That's why we can say that art makes life more real.

* * *

If art is not reflection of reality then the last reflection to get rid of is self-reflection. The fate of Narcissus is to drown in contemplation of him-

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self. The way out of the dilemma of Narcissus lies in the work of art as artifice. As artifice the work of art is a conscious tautology in which there is always an implicit (and sometimes explicit) reference to its own nature as artifact—self-reflexive, not self-reflective. It is not an imitation but a new thing in its own right, an invention. The very fact that it has validity only within its own terms is what cuts it loose from the solipsism of Narcissus. The successful work of art is a discrete energy system that takes its place among the other things of our world, available to the experience of anyone who is interested. Perhaps that is why the art critic, Jack Burnham, speaking of a contemporary artist, remarks that the problem he addresses is "how can sculpture define itself most rigorously as tautology." Instead of hiding its tautological nature with illusion, contemporary art capitalizes on it. This was a point that was made well and often in the art of the sixties: one immediately thinks of the precedents of Fellini, Genet, Beckett, and behind them the precedents of Brecht, Shklovsky, Sterne.

* * *

Among other things, full recognition of the art work as artifice rather than illusion means full recognition of the two realities behind literature: the reality of the spoken word and the reality of the written word. On one hand we get a resurgence of poetry as speech, Allen Ginsberg, the importance of the tape recorder, poetry as song lyric; and on the other hand, concrete poetry, the importance of arrangement on the page rather than traditional metric and, for the novel, no longer leaving one of the most important elements of composition in the hands of the typesetter: the placement of print on the page becomes an expressive resource of the novel. On one hand we get forms that have to do with time—the time it takes to compose the work or to experience it—that emphasize the process of composition and make it an important, often the most important, expressive element; and on the other hand we get an arbitrary formalism that has to do with space—a decision to arrange all lines and larger segments in groups of three, for example. One of the curious effects of a shift from art as illusion to art as artifact, and an example of how a new theory of composition subsumes rather than obliterates its predecessors, is the fate of description in fiction. Since it is no longer the novelist's business to "make us see" as it was in terms of imitation theories, description in fiction would seem to be pointless, but this is not the case. Description is too deeply embedded in the tradition of the novel ever to be lost, but its present significance is ironically antithetical to its former one. The contemporary novelist describes things with whose appearance we are already perfectly familiar (through

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photography, film, travel, or simply the modern quotidian) not to make us see those things but to test the language against them, to keep it alive to visual experience. The pleasure of description is the pleasure of a linguistic skill, not that of a genre painting.

* * *

Maintaining that an art work is true only within its own terms opens it to a description as a beneficial form of counterfeit, forgery, fraud, or lie. This argument is often urged with regard to fiction. Fiction is neither true nor false factually, but only good and bad. One might say that its truth is poetic truth: a statement of a particular rapport with reality sufficiently persuasive that we may for a time share it. This kind of "truth" does not depend on accurate description of "reality" but rather itself generates what we call reality, reordering our perceptions and sustaining a vital connection with the world, and may be considered on a parity with truth generated in other disciplines that extend, reorder, and vitalize the human domain. It works against schizoid withdrawal into abstraction or solipsism, and at the same time works against entrapment in its own tautologies by constantly dissolving them in experience. The Word makes the world a poem, then becomes irrelevant. Even so enlightened a novelist as Raymond Federman, who, however, still harbors a French structuralist orientation toward language, speaks in his essay "Surfiction" of the necessary "fraudulence" of the novel. He quotes my letter in reply in his anthology, *Surfiction*:

> Rather than serving as a mirror or redoubling on itself, fiction adds itself to the world, creating a meaningful "reality" that did not previously exist. Fiction is artifice but not artificial. It seems as pointless to call the creative powers of the mind "fraudulent" as it would be to call the procreative powers of the body such. What we bring into the world is *per se* beyond language, and at that point language is of course left behind—but it is the function of creative language to be left behind, to leave itself behind, in just that way. The word is unnecessary once it is spoken, but it has to be spoken. Meaning does not pre-exist creation and afterward it may be superfluous.

Such writing progressively works against itself in order to move us beyond language back into other aspects of experience. The wisdom of creative language includes the sense of its own limitations. But one must not lose sight of its power: creative writers deal with the enormous knowledge inherent in language and do not need the truths of discursive communication as an excuse for their art.

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Since we live in fictions, the job of the novelist is the almost impossible one of specifically not writing fiction, of unwriting novels—through our particular excellence creating books which suddenly, as we look over our shoulders, we realize have become, inevitably, novels. We are in a totally different position from those Moderns who were trying to transcend the real in isolated and unique visions. Instead, we are trying to plunge through literature into the world and commonalty (though on our own terms—the terms created in our novels). Our yen is union, not separation—to break through those cheap or outlived fictions which separate us from our world. It isn't a question of the validity of this or that kind of fiction, but of the fictive process itself which, far more than being a literary matter, involves those of belief, myth, and the ways we understand experience. We live in language, and only writers are free—only they know how to move into a more and more spacious syntax. The Moderns questioned the idea of a priori form; we question the idea of form itself. The innovative fiction writers of the American sixties were still writing "novels" even though they understood that "the" novel as defined at that time in this country—quite provincially, it is necessary to add—was a form whose credibility was exhausted. We write beyond any definitions of form because we believe that fiction is always in process of defining itself. Not the form but the imaginative process that creates the form is exemplary. Form is the embodiment, the temporary context of the imagination, an embodiment that is the consequence of the questioning of form by the imagination. The result of this point of view can be seen for the fiction of the seventies in a proliferation and variety of formal options. At the same time, the formal opening out of the sixties has raised the problem of how a work can remain continuous with experience while sustaining an internal structure that distinguishes it from other areas of experience. The slackness and characterlessness of much recent poetry that still bears the mark of the art of the sixties is the result of its failure to confront this problem. What Raymond Federman calls Surfiction has been essentially an exploration of the formal geometry of the open field by the imagination which, in so engaging it, generates the unpredictable text. The future novel, says Federman, will be "a kind of discourse whose shape will be an interrogation, an endless interrogation of what it is doing while it is doing it." In a world that pushes constantly in the direction of the impersonal and systematic we need fiction (and criticism) that is subversively personal and unsystematic—Miller, Sterne, Rabelais—unruly, unpredictable, threatening to humanists with its humanness.

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**Rosalind Krauss**

# IMPRESSIONISM: The Narcissism of Light

What can Impressionism mean to an age of narcissists? With what kind of directness can Impressionism speak to a sensibility as inwardly turned as ours? Generosity rises from the surface of Impressionist paintings. One finds it not only in the splendor of the color, but in that sense of benevolence towards objects which is just as important a feature of the style.

Any extended contact with Impressionism—such as the one afforded by the recent centenary exhibition mounted cooperatively by the Louvre and the Metropolitan Museum—seems to suggest that nothing could connect our own sensibilities to that last great phase of realism, except, possibly, nostalgia. The procedures of our own art involve a constant attempt to mirror the organization of consciousness, resulting in works that function in the closed circuit of self-reference. With modernist art, the intensity of aesthetic pleasure is increasingly hard to separate from the pleasures of self-absorption, until in certain forms, like video, the contemplative act takes on the quality of narcissism. Video—the latest dalliance of the avant-garde with technology—uses nonbroadcast television for aesthetic ends. The two most common strategies of the video artist are to record the image of himself recording himself or to manipulate his equipment until it records its own internal capacities for scanning. Therefore, when the avant-garde filmmaker Hollis Frampton describes the procedures by which video explores its own being, we are not surprised that he evokes images of auto-erotic display. He writes:

> But let video contemplate itself, and it produces, under endless guises, not identical avatars of its two-dimensional 'container,' but rather exquisitely *specific* variations upon its own most typical *content*. I mean that in the mandalas of feedback, graphically diagrammed illusions of alternating thrust and withdrawal, most often spiraling ambiguously like a Duchamp pun, video confirms, finally, a generic eroticism.

Attempting to produce that kind of acknowledgment of the medium

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one thinks of as modernist, the video artist searches for images that will reveal his basic procedures. And what he finds are images that invariably function as analogues to the erotic encounter with oneself that is narcissism. The contact one has through video is with the self—forever immediate and forever distanced. The satisfactions of that art form do not seem to contain anywhere the promise of contact with others.

But the world to which the Impressionists turned, the world they recorded in one canvas after another, seems to have been one of continuous extroversion. The sign of its gregariousness—printing itself on those scenes of luncheon parties, urban crowds, racecourses, and riverbanks—is the sign of the exteriority of light: of the sun's impressing upon all those subjects the stamp of its own independence. It was as though sunlight became an emblem of everything that is external, everything that is given, everything that is distinct from the inner space of consciousness.

Yet the discussions of Impressionism always bog down in what appear to be the internal contradictions of the style. Because with Impressionism, gregariousness contains the seeds of a growing introversion. The heightened realism of the Impressionist subject brought with it an equally heightened sense of artifice, diverting one's attention form the outer world to the inner processes of its depiction. Zola, quick to champion the Impressionists, was as quick to back away once the style came into its own. Where he had earlier seen the promise of a developing naturalism, he began to observe a growing sketchiness, which had developed to the point where the subjects of pictures were betrayed by the fractured crust of color that seemed to overlay them. As Meyer Schapiro once remarked, it was as if Zola watched the Impressionists turn his cherished "slice of life" into a "slice of cake."

Right from the start, the Impressionists' move away from the studio and out into the world was accompanied by tendencies subversive to their own ambitions for realism. As Zola saw, pictorial illusion broke down into a display of the picture's physical parts: deposits of pigment, trackmarks of the brush, occasional patches of bare white canvas. Furthermore, the borrowing of stylistic devices (from the Japanese print, from Dutch painting, from photography) combined with the heavy painting and divided brushwork to create a barrier between the viewer and what he wished to see. Degas' portrait subjects or his images of spectators at the races contrast with their surroundings in the striking silhouettes that we associate with the formal contractions of Japanese art. It is impossible not to see this obtrusion of "style," and to sense it as an internal brake on the realist painter's attempt to connect with his subject. It is as if, built into the Impressionist's demand for direct contact with his subject, there were already doubts about the feasibility of that demand.

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It has never struck me as obvious why this should have happened, for it certainly had not occurred in earlier forms of naturalism. A painting by Constable, for instance, constructed from sketches, but forged in the light and by the principles of the studio, does not flatten, formalize, and refract itself in anything like the way an Impressionist image does. Why leaving the studio, to get closer to the subject, should have resulted in that kind of aestheticized vision is simply not clear.

Writing ten years ago about the beginning of this internal contradiction in the art of Manet, Michael Fried spoke in terms of a "post-Kantian" situation, which he described as the withdrawal of "reality from the power of painting to represent it." And although that does characterize what one finds in painting after 1860, still it does not seem to explain it. What does it mean to say that reality withdraws, and how would a painter, in the 1860s, come to feel this? What, I am asking, would lead a painter into this kind of ambivalence about recording the natural world?

Perhaps that is a question for which we will not find a really satisfactory answer. Or perhaps there are as many answers as there were Impressionist painters. But my own thoughts on this subject tend to turn first of all to Monet.

One can well imagine Claude Monet as a young high school student in Le Havre, educated to a taste in art that was thoroughly bourgeois (which is to say academic), preening himself on his own precocious talent as a caricaturist, and wholly contemptuous of the dowdy little landscape sketches that took up space in the same shop as his own more telling work. The creator of those sketches, Eugene Boudin, seems to have been a man whose lack of pretentiousness was matched by his patience and generosity. Monet went out into the landscape with Boudin. Through those repeated sketching expeditions, he became committed to the endless problems of depicting nature. But in order to become a "real" painter and not just a dabbler in nature-studies, Monet had to go to Paris. There he entered the Academy through the studio of Gleyre, only to find that in some fundamental sense, his home was in the landscape. During the next few years he spent more time out of the Academy than in it; he became a commuter to Fountainebleau, where he found, in the example of the Barbizon painter Daubigny, another ardent researcher in the science of nature.

At that point the story gets more interesting because unlike Boudin, or indeed the other members of the Barbizon school, Daubigny was a real open-air painter. This is to say that he was out there in the fields not simply making sketches which he then took back to the studio where the real painting would be constructed. Instead, he was standing his ground and insisting that the thing he made out-of-doors *was* the painting. And this despite the

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fact that the thing he made in that condition was quite peculiar. It was an image that was extremely polarized in terms of broad masses of light and dark, and within those masses there was precious little in the way of articulation. It was as though both the modulation of the form (shading) and the presence of detail (drawing) had been gobbled up at the opposite ends of the light spectrum. Everything darker than medium was summarized with featureless lumps of near-black, and everything lighter was left as a whitish field.

Now, although summary or scattered notation was acceptable in a sketch, it was not acceptable in a "painting," because in the nineteenth century a painting was defined as a constructed unity. What secured the identity of something as a painting was a unifying vision, a vision that would structure an array of facts and interrelate them. That was the strangeness of Daubigny's work. His fractured images, lacking the evidence of a unifying vision, seemed also without the prerequisites to lay claim to being paintings. It was this that led Gautier to speak of Daubigny's "rough drafts," his work in which there were "merely spots of color juxtaposed," the result of being "satisfied by an impression."

At this point one wants to ask the question: what was there in Daubigny's experience that prevented him from translating nature into paintings that were conventionally unified? The answer that seems to recapture the logic of the situation is: photography.

It is hard to think one's way back to the 1830s and 1840s, to experience the initial response to the photograph. It is hard to read the first statements about the invention of that tool with anything like the naiveté and precision they demand. When Daguerre presented his process before the Academy of Science in Paris in 1839, he cautioned that "the daguerreotype is not merely an instrument which serves to draw nature . . . [it] gives her the power to reproduce herself." "The pencil of nature" was what the Englishman Fox Talbot called his own photographic invention; "sun drawings" was the reference used in Paris. Louis Arago, championing Daguerre's patent, proclaimed that "light itself reproduces the forms and proportions of external objects." This is language that goes beyond the notion that what the photograph does is to automate man's procedures for making pictures. Rather, those words voice their speaker's amazement that through photography one experiences nature's capacity for *self*-replication.

The situation that surrounded photography was a startling kind of impotence. Man stood by and saw that nature was capable of reproducing herself. Through some kind of yoga-like suppleness, light could bend around and allow nature to fold back upon herself, to render her own likeness without the aid of man. It was, as someone said, "drawing carried to a

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degree which Art can never attain . . . we count the paving stones; we see the humidity caused by the rain." Thus one response to what nature could report of herself was tied to the fact that she could outdistance human perception. The paving stones and the humidity that registered on the daguerreotype plate, in the astonishing way that they brought the distance into focus, were evidence of the meagerness of human vision.

And in a completely opposite way, the calotype (which generated the image from a negative) called in evidence about meagerness of a different sort. We might call it evidence about the need for human vision to fill in the details of a nature polarized into the absolutes of dark and light. The calotype involved a different process from the daguerreotype and resulted in a different image. Producing prints from an oiled paper negative, the calotype's images were not as finely resolved as those of the unique glass daguerreotype. They were composed of more abrupt masses of black and white. They were blunt and strange and nearly without detail. The calotypes we know from the 1850s bear a striking resemblance to the pictures by Daubigny.

We know Daubigny and the other painters of the Barbizon were transfixed by photography. And, we realize, they were forced to see a corollary. A year after the first photograph was made, Arago invented the "photometer"—a primitive lightmeter which brought with it unsettling information. If pointed at a patch of white paint and then at a patch of black paint, the photometer would register the difference on its scale of one (for black) to ninety (for white). But if aimed at the lightest part of the sky and then down at the darkest shadow on the ground, the instrument would record a separation of one to 9,000.

The inferences that had to be drawn from this are fairly clear. The range of the natural array was simply off the scale of human vision and demonstrably beyond the reach of the constricted powers of art to record it. That artificial unity of the painting—in terms of its neat circle of values: up toward white from its bistre ground or down toward black—was shown to be the most hopeless kind of contrivance. For nature stood revealed as polarized, split apart, distended, beyond the grasp of an artist's means. And when, as in the calotype, nature presented herself *to* herself, she did so in terms of a near unintelligibility. The shadowy flatness of the calotype presented nature pushing towards the limits of the light spectrum, folded back upon herself in a supreme lack of definition.

There is something else the calotype contained which is worth noting. Unlike the daguerreotype, its images had grain. The calotype print displayed the fibrous texture of the paper negative from which it was made. Nature might have folded back upon herself, but first she had to touch

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ground upon a man-made object. In that tension between the disunity of the lights and darks of the image, and the repetitions of the granular structure of the paper, are the seeds of a whole new conception of unity. But it is a unity that is founded on a primary admission: that one is, oneself, external to the inner workings of the event.

The prospect of nature reproducing herself through an internal act of contemplation suggests an image of primal narcissism, and narcissism is in fact invoked by the early critical response to photography, although it is man's narcissism rather than nature's. When Baudelaire wished to express his contempt for Daguerre's invention, he wrote: "from that moment our squalid society rushed, Narcissus to a man, to gaze at its trivial image on a scrap of metal." But the Impressionists seem to have learned about a different kind of narcissism from the introduction of photography: When nature bends over that pool to regard herself, she becomes strangely inscrutable.

The by-product of a lost intelligibility is a severe derangement in the painter's conception of pictorial coherence. Monet's Impressionism derives from the sense that the unity of a painting of nature cannot be, must not be, secured at the outset because one does not know on what grounds to secure it. When Courbet offered advice to Monet in the mid-1860s, it was to urge the younger artist to construct his landscapes on a bistre ground. As Monet wrote:

> Courbet always painted upon a somber base on canvases prepared with brown, a convenient procedure, which he endeavored to have me adopt. "Upon it," he used to say, "you can dispose your lights, your colored masses; you immediately see your effect.

He was urging Monet to take advantage of the prepared surface as a way of guaranteeing the picture's unity in advance. Monet refused. He courted, instead, a value structure with none of the customary transitions between dark and light, just as he pursued a crude and disjointed form of drawing. He seems to have felt very deeply the insufficiency of the known devices for unity.

The centenary exhibition of the first Impressionist show included Monet's 1867 *Women in a Garden*. Courbet gave Monet advice on that painting too. In the work, Monet groups four women among the shrubs and rosebeds of a private garden, emphasizing the contrast between the light fabric of their summer dresses and the lush green of their surroundings. The picture's subject, as well as its scale (it is over eight feet tall) gives us clues to the ambitions of its author: to deploy nearly life-sized figures in a setting that is both contemporary and natural. Since Manet's scandalous *Déjeuner*

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*sur l'herbe* of 1863, painters had repeatedly tried to achieve that updated marriage between figure painting and landscape. Monet's sights are so clearly set on pulling off this particular feat that the very grouping of his figures (three massed together in the left foreground and one isolated in the right middle ground) reenacts the *Déjeuner.* But the *Déjeuner* had been a studio picture, and nothing less than total open-air execution would do for Monet. Given the dimensions of his canvas, this necessitated the digging of a trench in his yard so that, by lowering the canvas below grade, he could maintain his own orientation to the scene while dealing with the upper parts of the work.

Courbet came by to see Monet while the picture was in progress. Because the sky was overcast, Monet had stopped work to wait for the sun. Courbet thought this intermission peculiar. Why not, he reasoned, use the time to paint in the trees and shrubs of the background? Describing this incident in *The History of Impressionism*, John Rewald writes, "Monet, however, did not accept this advice, for he knew he could obtain complete unity only if the whole painting was executed under identical conditions of light; otherwise, there seemed no reason to go to the trouble of doing it out-of-doors." Indeed. No reason at all. And yet the painting is strikingly disunified. It is constructed of wedges of dark and light in such a way that the figures render their surrounding space peculiarly unreadable. On the left side, the group of one seated and two standing women form a complex, saillike pattern that hooks onto the edge of the work as though attaching itself to a mast. By contrast with that secure placement, the rest of the space becomes indeterminate, so that it is hard to know where the fourth figure is, or what, in the paper-cut-out quality of her rendering, she could possibly be doing.

It is said that Manet disliked the picture. And even in Zola's praise of it, one hears a tone of defensiveness, an admission that the work exists in fragments:

> Last year a picture of his was rejected: a figure piece—women in light summer dresses picking flowers along the paths of a garden; the sun falls directly on their brilliant white shirts; the tree casts warm shadows like textile patterns on the path and across the brilliant white dresses. The result is quite singular. To dare to do something like that—to cut in two the material of the dresses with light and shade . . .

It is hard for us to recapture the weirdness of a dress cut to pieces by a cross fire of sunlight and shadow. What we can see much more easily is the transitional quality of the picture—its stolid refusal to work according to a traditional idea of structure, and its as-yet-unformed conception of a new

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one. The solitary woman in the deepest part of the garden "floats" because Monet has not yet seen that *all* his large wedges of flat, high-value must be anchored to the stable security of the picture's frame. Had Monet sliced about a foot off the right side of the canvas, the dress of the woman in the background would have been cropped by the edge of the painting. The uncertainty of her position in space would thereby have been compensated for by the certainty of her connection to the vertical side of the picture-object. *Women in a Garden* would then be composed in a manner that we would recognize as "Impressionist." But in 1867 Monet had not yet arrived at that kind of compensatory unity. He was still assuming that although he did not know it, and undoubtedly could not see it, nature herself possessed an intrinsic unity, which, were he persistent enough, he could grasp. What he did know was that a unity assumed prior to the visual encounter, a unity for which the known arrangement of a woman's gown would be an emblem, was not sufficient. Therefore he had "to dare to do something like that—to cut in two the material of the dresses with light and shade."

Two years later, in the extraordinary *La Grenouillère* of 1869, Monet arrived at impressionist composition as we know it. Depicting a scene of water sport and outdoor dining on the Seine at Bougival, the painting installs boats, covered barge, and bathers as a set of large, dark shapes pressed against the high shimmer of water. All these masses are attached to the picture edge as literally as if they were flat blades knifed into the soft wood of its frame: boats and overhanging foliage wedged into its corners, the long rectangle of the barge slotted into its side. The one "floating" area, an island in the center of the river, fares no differently. Four dark lines (two catwalks and the vertical plunge of a tree trunk and its reflection) move from each of the painting's sides to act as tie rods, binding it into the frontal, gridlike structure of the surface. These dark, flattened shapes attach to the picture surface like something literally withdrawn from the circulation of the river's expanse. Space is acknowledged as naturally unintelligible, for the painting's sufficiency is one thing, and the landscape's unity is proclaimed as something else.

What composition does to space, the strange abbreviation of the brushwork does to textures. The paint skin declares a breach between what the eye perceives in nature and what nature perceives in herself. The brushwork's testimony to its being outside the recorded phenomenon—hopelessly separate from what it must be for itself—suggests parallels with the calotype's grain.

We think of Impressionism as an art of color. But it did not start that way. Before 1874 Monet is a tonal painter, structuring landscape through the procedures of black/white contrast. That he should have worked like

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this speaks to the crucial role of photography, because the photographic image and the "truths" which it documented seem to have shaped Monet's view of the problems internal both to nature and to art. He was not involved with a superficial imitation of photography's own random constellations of form, but something that goes rather deeper. It is something we might see as the lesson learned from the near opacity of the photographic image.

In Degas' case the details are different but the lesson drawn appears to be similar. Of all the Impressionists, Degas is the one most often linked to photography. We know the sources for his depictions of animal movement in the photographs of Muybridge; and in general his composition (from 1879 on) has long been thought to have profited by inspired raids on the vast inventory of photographs that surrounded him. Yet the connection, if it is there with any importance, has to be seen working on a level which addresses the notion of structure as a whole rather than sets of arresting details. To that end it is useful to think about Degas' experience with the medium of monotype.

Monotype is a print-making process which—unlike all other kinds of prints—does not allow for multiple impressions of the same image. Monotype impressions are pulled from drawings made in printer's ink on metal or glass plates. There are two ways of doing these drawings. In one, the "dark-field" manner, the artist completely inks the plate and then with rags or his fingers wipes away areas of black to create the highlights and middle tones of the image. In the other, the "light-field" technique, the artist simply draws in ink with a brush on a clean plate. In either case, etched lines are not used, so there is no way to reconstitute the image on the plate once one or (at most) two pulls have absorbed the ink onto the page of the print.

In 1874 Degas began making monotypes. Except for a small group of brothel scenes, Degas stuck to monotypes of the dark-field manner. The works he produced have a strange, sooty quality; the light, wiped-away shapes of figures appear oppressed, like the shoots of new plants pushing up through burnt ground. From the very first monotype Degas pulled a second impression which he worked over with pastel and gouache. Of his enormous production of pastels, one quarter are on a monotype base.

The dark-field monotype had a strategic importance for Degas. A compulsive draftsman, an inveterate maker of preparatory drawings for his finished paintings, Degas could use the monotype print to combat a tendency in his own drawing to resort to formulas. With the monotype he could force a primary encounter with a field of broad, crude masses. He would have to apply line to a visual surface that was mutely polarized into black and white shapes before he had even touched the paper with his chalk. The scatter of evidence presented by this monotype base was not unlike the calotype.

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Further, Degas had mechanized the creation of the image. The print he pulled had gone through a process that removed it from his direct control, so that, like the photographic image, it looked back at him with a strange opacity—an image that had reproduced itself leaving him with the job of deciphering it. To decipher the image, Degas applied the colored strokes of pastel. Because the lithographic ink of the monotype base is oily, these strokes refused to blend or fuse with one another, contracting instead into granular beads of chalky color that appeared to separate themselves from the underlying forms. The result is an internally bifurcated image: a residual structure of black and white forms maintain their own coherence on one level; on another are notations of color perception that rise in front of the monochrome shapes like a mist.

Until the monotype gave Degas a way of really absorbing the message of photography, he was not an Impressionist. Before the mid-1870s he was an inspired naturalist painter. The 1873 *Cotton Exchange, New Orleans*—in which a dozen or so men assemble in a large office—is a splendid, very special work; but it is not an Impressionist one. In the *Cotton Exchange*, texture is seamlessly integrated to a sense of underlying mass, and the space could have been laid out by Euclid. Only after the monotypes does one feel Degas consistently forcing a separation, a rift, between the masses of bodies and the particles that stand for the optical recording of their textures. It is as if the eye, looking at the figures, could only catch their surfaces, because the figures *themselves* were looking the other way.

Degas' final, most extreme production of monotypes is a group of landscapes of the 1890s. They have the quality of a completely inward-looking, imaginary space. Radically flattened, exquisitely grained, they seem to stretch over the eyes of the viewer like an opaque film. Within that film, the image has reproduced itself according to its own laws; we see the spread, drip, and stipple of ink recording the invisible pressure of a smooth plate against the irregularities of laid paper.

What photography had revealed to Degas and Monet was the remoteness of perception from reality. Excluded from the inherent organization of nature seen as distanced and self-absorbed, the alternative they found was a unity forged from their own corresponding introspection. Their art becomes the first chapter of that compulsion to make art from the didactic organization of perception that is the text of modernism.

Finally, then, Impressionism feels neither so remote from the formal procedures of recent art, nor so alien from the narcissistic considerations that are their by-product. The erotic component of certain sculpture of the last ten years (I am thinking of Hesse, Judd, Morris, Nauman and Serra) combines the sensuousness and frigidity that is the narcissistic subtext of the

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formal self-absorption dear to modernism: the pleasure it takes in the act of self-definition. To shape material not by or for the performance of a function but rather for the display of its internal properties, as this sculpture does, is to do a very particular thing to physical substances. It is to project onto them the illusion that the objects they form can qualify and define their own physicality, and in that peculiar form of sentience can mirror the human consciousness that regards them. At the same time, those mirrors of the viewer's own being are inescapably alien to him. They possess the brutish unresponsiveness of inert matter. To see oneself in them is to see oneself in a medium that enforces utter remoteness from the object of one's contemplation: oneself.

There is in video the possibility of taking this paradox of "looking in by looking out" and connecting it more explicitly with its psychic energies. The video that simply packages narcissistic display fails to do this in any way that goes beyond a kind of aesthetic freak show. But certain video promises the organization and analysis of this material. The long, narrow video corridors that Bruce Nauman built in 1969 lead their viewer through a space that imitates the forward trajectory of vision. As one advances along the corridor, one moves progressively farther away from a video camera mounted at the back of the corridor, and closer to a TV monitor placed at its front. The image one walks toward, as if to meet it, is one's own. But it is oneself, seen from behind and growing smaller with every step taken. It is an image of photography capturing and exploring a circuit of space from which we as subjects are naturally excluded.

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# GOING TO THE MOVIES

## David Denby

## THE TWO GODFATHERS

Near the end of her review of *The Godfather* (Part One), Pauline Kael wrote, "These gangsters *like* their life style, while we—seeing it from outside—are appalled," and, Kael concluded, "Nothing is resolved at the end of *The Godfather*, because the family business goes on. Terry Malloy didn't clean up the docks at the end of *On the Waterfront*; that was a lie. *The Godfather* is popular melodrama, but it expresses a new tragic realism." It's often hard to tell who's included in Kael's "we" (on any given occasion she may mean the entire movie audience, the readers of *The New Yorker*, or a limited group of like-minded persons), but if she intended to characterize the likely common response, she was way off the mark. Most people obviously were not appalled by the gangsters, and I doubt that many viewed the continuation of the Corleone enterprise or any other element in the movie as tragic. For all its pessimism and violence, *The Godfather* was hugely enjoyed as a kind of grisly comedy. These mad, paradoxical killers—sadistic and pious, flamboyant and self-abasing—awed and amused the audience with the weirdly archaic style of their behavior. Feudatories in the corporate age, dour celebrants of obscure codes and implacable loyalties, they killed with such fervent sensuality they were almost romantic.

At the same time, they were no threat to us. Mario Puzo and Francis Ford Coppola were very shrewd about this, and more than a little disingenuous. They knew the public loathes ordinary, unorganized movie criminals—muggers and rapists and rooftop snipers—and regularly applauds when Clint Eastwood wipes them out like vermin. Thus in their movie about the aristocrats of crime they were careful never to suggest that the audience itself could be hurt by any of these fellows; indeed, all the everyday victims of Mafia extortion and violence (store-owners, truckers, union members, etc.) were simply omitted, and the issue of harm to society at large was never raised, leaving us (meaning nearly everyone) free to enjoy the intramural mayhem without anxiety. Since Puzo and Coppola did no more than barely outline the economic causes of Mafia rivalry, conducting endless, incomprehensible

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vendettas seemed to be the gangsters' sole activity, the sole definition of what a gangster was. Odd, often very funny, but certainly not tragic.

I don't mean to imply that Puzo and Coppola let us off the hook entirely. The Corleones might have been merely exotic, irrelevant to America's central concerns, but in a twist to the joke, Puzo and Coppola patterned their Mafia types after American big businessmen at the turn of the century—those grim Horatio Algers, predatory heroes in the war of all against all. In *The Godfather*, as opposed to the Kefauver hearings, the Mafia was not simply some imported ideology or conspiracy; it was the result of two cultures meeting and interlocking, the grafting of one tradition of fraud and violence (Sicilian) onto another (American). I believe the audience, far from being appalled, widely accepted this cool "sociological" or "historical" view of the Corleones—that they were immigrants pursuing a corrupt but distinctly American road to power and status because legitimate roads had been closed to them—and also accepted and admired their success. The brilliant triumph of the movie itself, its glittering power as a media event, only confirmed that the Mafia had made it—at least in terms of public appreciation. The explosive question of whether the public's use of the words "Mafia" and "Cosa Nostra" constituted an insult to Italian-Americans faded as an issue once *The Godfather* had become such an irresistible success, for in this country the large-scale media exposure of a given phenomenon often creates legitimacy-through-celebrity. In no time at all, a widely publicized "slur" can become, if not a badge of pride, then at least a means of plugging into the irresistible circuits of media excitement—in other words, an advantage. "It makes me proud to be an Italian," a man behind me said to his companions at the end of the movie, and he said it without irony.

Perhaps he was proud (and non-Italians admiring) because, in the movie's central conceit, the Corleones were that rare thing in America, a happy family; and they were portrayed—at least in the first half of the movie—as a model of health, yes, as happy monsters whose violent behavior emerged from a high appetite for life as much as from the family's peculiar way of doing business. The ambivalence was morally audacious for a popular movie, and it's a mark of Coppola's skill that he got almost everyone to accept it. By the time Michael Corleone shoots his father's enemies in the restaurant scene, Coppola had most of us where he wanted us; the hair-raising use of conventional narrative techniques secured our acquiescence and complicity. With an awed laugh, directed at ourselves as much as the screen, we accepted the notion that Michael's violence was an act of family piety, a way of accepting his father, his family past, his natural destiny.

Those few who didn't accept it, who were alarmed by the mixture of graciousness and murder, complained of sentimentality. For the anti-senti-

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mentalists there was too much happiness in the Corleone family and too much pictorial beauty in the movie. Despite the disingenuous strategy of *The Godfather* that I mentioned earlier, the charge of sentimentality makes no sense to me. It ignores the entire second half of the movie, where Michael Corleone gradually becomes an isolated and ruthless killer, up to the remarkable moment when he looks his wife straight in the eye and lies, shutting her out forever. As for the ingratiating visual quality of the film, a grainy, intentionally sordid photographic style would actually have been the more conventional option for a gangster movie. Instead, Coppola emphasized the beauty of the gangsters' lives in both Sicily and America, increasing our sense of moral squalor and violation: they lived in beauty and acted vilely. In any case, it's a great natural advantage for a movie to be physically beautiful if the director and cinematographer know what they're doing, and Francis Ford Coppola and Gordon Willis's work was hardly the soft-focus lyricism of commercial hacks. During the shimmering, slightly overexposed Sicilian sequences we are meant to feel the corruption gathering in the lemon and green ripeness of the countryside. Sicily, that eternally fouled paradise! The rottenness became an emanation of its heat and sun. This may not impress historians or political scientists very much, but it's the most expressive kind of movie shorthand. The dark brown and red American interiors, a setting for secrets and plots, carried associations of the corrupted stained-leather atmosphere, the phony distinguished style, of boardrooms, manor libraries, and clubs. Like so much of the best popular art, *The Godfather* was almost seductively easy and pleasurable, but its pleasurableness functioned for the audience as a variety of knowledge—we were provoked by the satisfaction the movie gave us into new forms of understanding.

*The Godfather II* is also extraordinarily beautiful, but it's a much slower, heavier, more obviously ironic film, without the paralyzing energy, audacious wit, or imperious command of the audience. Admirers have found a quality of new "depth," but to me it feels like new weight. On the other hand, cynics who assume the film was made simply to sustain an earlier box-office triumph are dead wrong—this one wasn't made only for the money. My complaint is that it draws on Part One with rather dismaying reverence and over-explicitness, dulling the interest—through sheer attenuation—of ideas that were clear and forceful in the earlier film's closing scenes: the increasing isolation of the Americanized Mafioso, Michael Corleone, and the persistence of Sicilian patterns of "honor" through the generations. In Part One the cultural mix of Sicily and America produced some episodes that were funny and bizarrely "right" (the men plotting tribal vengeance over a take-home dinner) and also a convincing denouement. In Part Two, however, the intercutting of America in the sixties with earlier periods in Sicily and Little Italy

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produces the effect of a pattern sustained by will power and heavy labor after its logic has collapsed. Now that Michael's so completely an American it's no longer unequivocally "right" that he act with Sicilian thoroughness and cruelty at the end, murdering his own brother. At least the act requires some further explanation, but Puzo and Coppola have allowed their "pattern" to assume the work that should be done in a narrative film by old-fashioned motivation. The results are hollow, mechanical on a grand scale, and incomprehensible. They try to place the "sociological" view of Italian-American crime in historical perspective, ranging from Fanucci, the florid turn-of-the-century neighborhood extortionist in white suit and erotic moustaches, to Michael Corleone, grey-suited, corporation-cold, ruthlessly presiding over the fouling of comtemporary America with WASP and Jew as equal partner. This is beguiling as social history but extremely vague as information on the details of criminal activity in any period. After six hours and twenty minutes of film I still haven't understood how a single one of these gangsters actually operates.

What is it about the theme of immigration to the United States that brings out the reverent worst in writers, directors, critics? Oscar Handlin's famous book, *The Uprooted*, was so heavily stuffed with large, noble emotions and heroic travail, and so lacking in individual experience and feelings that I couldn't get through it. In the same vein, Jan Troell's epic film, *The Emigrants*, loads onto the suffering shoulders of its hero and heroine every typical problem of leavetaking, oceanic crossing, and settlement in the new land without ever creating much interest in either of them as characters. Coppola, too, depends on the universal, the typical, the general whenever he comes in sight of the Statue of Liberty. He shoots young Vito's entrance into New York harbor and passage through customs and Ellis Island as a blandly monumental picture-essay in *Life*-magazine style; his Little Italy movie-street is so packed with bustling-immigrant-life cliches that, except for a scene in a working-class theater and another in front of a Punch and Judy show, one's eye never takes in anything in particular. Apparently, mere individuality would be too small, too eccentric, and mean-spirited individuality practically an outrage against the immigration theme's familiar ideal of suffering virtue. When Vito grows up into a gallant neighborhood protector, an urban Robin Hood, he's almost totally unreal—a dreamboat immigrant-gangster. Suffused in creamy, glamorous light (banal as an Italian "chromo" in the scenes with mother and child), Robert De Niro establishes the physical antecedents of the Brando character (soft, cracked voice and emotional reserve) but not the viciousness, the physical menace of the future extortionist, murderer, and big-time gangster. In these scenes the "sociological" view of crime has been used as a way of softening the criminal.

A movie epic needs an eccentric character as its focus or else it solemnly

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tells us what we already know. Unfortunately, as Michael Corleone grows older he becomes another of those familiar, semi-mythological American bastards, an obscenely rich and completely lonely man of great power. This is no surprise and not terribly interesting. The notion that extreme success in America isolates you from everything worth striving for is now too complacent and banal an *apercu* to sustain the grandiose and solemn treatment it gets here. If Puzo and Coppola aren't going to turn Michael into an entertaining grotesque, couldn't they develop him, open him up a bit? Poor Al Pacino, locked in an unyielding, inarticulate funk, stares and stares and becomes a bore—of baffling intensity, but a bore nonetheless. The final scenes, with Michael brooding over his darkened blue lake while memories of the family he's decimated torture his mind, resound with the hollow certainty of an irony too easily achieved. In Part One Coppola escaped from those moralists who wanted the Corleones to be *unhappy*, but now he's succumbed.

Still, despite all one's dissatisfactions, Coppola appears to be a uniquely central and powerful American talent. His feeling for American surfaces—the glancing intimations of social status in gesture, tone of voice, decor, clothes—is as precise as any director's in American film history. Perhaps one has to cite John O'Hara for the proper comparison, but Coppola is more playful. His showpiece big party scene near the beginning of Part Two, an obvious contrast with Part One's wedding celebration, depends on observation so acute it becomes a form of malicious wit. The Corleones have charged into the American center by the late fifties, and they've paid the price in blandness: their lakeside bash is a ceremonial drag, more like a TV variety show than a party; the hearty Italian street music has been replaced by a suave-sounding dance band and a blond cherub's chorus, the natural gaiety by a desperate desire to have fun. Having moved the base of their operations from Long Island to Lake Tahoe, they've fallen in with western WASPs, or at least the dissolute remainders of a WASP ruling class—a pious, hollow-voiced senator (played by G.D. Spradlin as a degenerate combination of Edward Gurney and Ed Sullivan) and blond playmates for brother Fredo and sister Connie (Connie's lover, in a cruelly symbolic casting stroke, is acted by the washed-up juvenile Troy Donahue). Coppola rarely emphasizes this sort of thing; he depends on our memories, our powers of observation, and our willingness to make connections without having them spelled out. When Michael visits Hyman Roth, the millionaire Jewish gangster with the middle-class family life style, the hilarious mediocrity of Roth's Miami home—pale yellow walls and wicker furniture, darkened little TV room, recessive wife serving lunch on a portable table—is so eloquently expressive of the habitual practice of fraud that one is convinced that realism is not only the most natural but the most magical of cinematic modes.

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Coppola's unusual curiosity about such things as fatherhood, marriage, power, spiritual anguish, etc., sets him apart from the run of Hollywood directors as a central interpreter of American experience, a man taking the big risks, working outside the limits of traditional genres. The lack of eccentricity or repeating obsession, the avoidance of obvious visual metaphor or radical foreshortening of narrative may deceive some viewers into declaring there's no artist behind the perfectly achieved images, the marvelous amplitude and evenness of flow, but that would be a mistake induced by the influence of the auteur theory on educated taste. Those looking for "personality"—the flourishes of "signature"—may be too distracted to feel the power of Coppola's work. His personality (sad word) emerges in the way he chooses to reveal his characters. For instance, he has a genius for noisy, shallow, self-propelling types—the American as untrammeled egotist, powerful and infantile at the same time. He appears to love their theatrical energy and flash, and his sense of how such people behave in social situations is so accurate that he can do very funny scenes without a trace of caricature. He's at his best in the convention of "surveillance experts" in *The Conversation*. Boastful, frenetic, absurdly aggressive, these American go-getters can't stop competing for a moment, not even at a party, and so they begin showing off their skills and playing dirty tricks on one another. Their casual cruelty while "relaxing," their amiable, thoughtless dedication to "professionalism" as a binding justification for any act, gradually produces a kind of horror that is all the more powerful for coming at us so obliquely. The sequence never ceases to play at its quiet, evenly sustained level of observation, yet the reverberations are tragic; it's hard not to think of soldiers testing weapons in Vietnam and other recent examples of American professionals run amuck. To expose the murderous falsity of appearances without betraying the appearances themselves remains one of the principal tasks of realism and one of the things movies do most successfully. Coppola's work, at its best, sustains the highest traditions of realism. Despite everything that can be marked off against him, there's every reason to expect Coppola to be a principal exponent of American themes in the movies of the next two decades.

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# BOOKS

## NEVER ON SUNDAY

**A MONTH OF SUNDAYS.** By John Updike. Alfred A. Knopf. $6.95.

The surface of Mr. Updike's writing twitches and quivers incessantly, never more so than in this new novel about a faintly hedonist minister "with doubts." By some process of intellection that is foreign to me this prose tic has been critically taken to be a sublime style; the disparaging word, as it were, is rare to come by apropos Mr. Updike's work. When it is discovered it manifests itself as no more than a slight reservation. I don't know why this should be so. Mr. Updike has all the grievous faults of an Oscar Wilde updated to include contemporary paraphernalia, speech, etc., but none of these things can disguise the purple blush that suffuses the work. It is, if I may use such a word, unachieved, i.e., its fancy images are not in touch with the world but emblazon it. The writing is what is in some quarters known as "vivid."

> We played in each other like children in puddles.

Mr. Updike writes. Why not "mud" instead of puddles? Or "dogs" instead of children? Or anything at all for that matter? When the aim is "vivid" writing, it seems that anything goes as long as the surface dances.

The work buckles and falls apart time after time under the weight of this concatenation of images, often linked together by comparisons that work to conceal the reality they are supposedly revealing.

> . . . newsletters and quarterlies that pour through a minister's letter slot like urine from a cow's vulva.

Mr. Updike has many more tricks in his book, one of them the disfiguring and falsifying one of anthropomorphizing anything that threatens to escape the net of his ego.

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> The moon peered crookedly over his shoulder, curious enough to tilt its head.

> The blue night barked as I opened the door.

It might however be argued, fairly enough, that this is not Mr. Updike's voice, since the novel purports to be a diary/journal kept by the Reverend Thomas Marshfield, the narrator. In fact, the flap copy, taking note of this, bubbles that the minister's confessions are rendered in a "wonderfully overwrought style." This might legitimize the flaws of the novel except for the fact that Marshfield's style as given in *A Month of Sundays* is the author's in other books. The only one I have to hand is *Pigeon Feathers*, but haphazard rummaging through it turns up—in the third person—the same "wonderfully overwrought style."

> The walls of the college buildings, crusty and impregnable, swept past like an armada of great gray sails.

Which, in its way, is almost as shiny and meaningless as this fragment of Wilde's:

> It seemed to me that all my life had been narrowed to one perfect point of rose-coloured joy. She trembled all over, and shook like a white narcissus.

Both specimens work to remove us from the matter under observation; the comparisons muddy the things compared; the adjectives function so as to give us the appearance of specificity, lest we see the rabbit being put into the hat. These are triumphs of that sensibility that cannot leave off worrying the world into its own design. I cannot accept the Reverend Marshfield's style as being his own—Mr. Updike's other works of fiction display the same style with endemic consistency.

There are a couple of other things to say about this novel. While it is not "about" sex, sex is the engine that drives it. However, it is neither pornographic nor filled with the grim and humorless details of the post-Sadean technologist. It does not stand in breathless awe of sex-as-mystery as invented and patented by Lawrence. It is—what can I say?—amused. It is witty and bored and knowing. There is nothing of the comic in the novel—Mr. Updike cannot make anyone laugh. The comic writer accepts reality as intelligible in itself, not as a poor drab thing that awaits his gilding. Comic things are inherently comic and we laugh when the comic intelligence reveals their essential essence, when it recognizes them. Wittiness does not recognize, it explains. It gives us an "insight" into its subject whereas it seems to me that the comic

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grasps the entire outside of its subject. I go on about this because I don't understand why a writer would choose to use this kind of wryly amused and sophisticated cleverness to deal with a subject that does not respond to it—that, in fact, resists it tenaciously except on the level of bedroom farce—which is rarely farcical and never sexual. I suspect that this mode allows Mr. Updike's romantic sensibility full play. With it, he can most certainly eat his world. But he can't have it too.

Then we have the characters. Mr. Updike is of that school that holds that characters are the sum of their parts, i.e., add layer upon layer of description touching upon modes of dress, manners, speech, habitations, possessions, mores, etc., and presto! we know who the character is and how he will act in a given circumstance, we know, that is, his reality. Conversely, if we know what he says and thinks, we know what he will wear, his tastes, and so on. The author partakes, in other words, of the tried and true novelistic signals in ordering his characters' activities and lives. An odd sophistry of causality inheres in such constructions. Jane, Marshfield's wife, is prim, proper, intelligent, educated, athletic. It routinely follows that she is sexually unsatisfying to Marshfield; she is civilized when she is confronted by his lover, and so on. His lover is slightly shabby, a trifle vulgar, rather embarrassingly emotional, and divorced. She, of course, lives in a raw, new housing development; she is crass when she meets Jane, etc. The reader almost expects Mr. Updike to make her chew gum and subscribe to the *Reader's Digest*. Marshfield's assistant is young, soupy-minded, liberal, "against the war." His attitude toward, for instance, young people with drug problems? You guessed it. And on and on. The signals flash, the attitudes stiffen, the characters "walk off the pages." This is the kind of characterization one expects from Neil Simon, an effortless sliding into the path of least resistance. It has little to do with the making of serious fiction.

Yet all these things that I touch upon are reckoned by Mr. Updike's admirers—and they are many—as strengths, not weaknesses, as wonders of truth, style, audacity, vision, even as indications of greatness. But each page of this book throws up a wall behind which it is well-nigh impossible to discover the manifold realities of the world that the author chooses to deal with. We are given this world as seen by Mr. Updike, as interpreted by him. We are given wit and talent and we are given invention. But we are not given literature.

Oddly (and sadly) enough, this kind of fiction is often thought to be poetic, though it has nothing to do with poetry unless one conceives of the poem as a bauble. On the other hand, Hugh Kenner has termed this sort of writing "a surface scummed by iridescent prose." That strikes me as both just and exact.

**GILBERT SORRENTINO**

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# THE PERFORMING SELVES

**THE LIFE OF EMILY DICKINSON.** 2 vols. By Richard B. Sewall. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. $30.00.

**FAULKNER: A BIOGRAPHY.** 2 vols. By Joseph Blotner. Random House. $25.00.

**LINCOLN STEFFENS: A BIOGRAPHY.** By Justin Kaplan. Simon and Schuster. $10.00.

**THE BORN EXILE: GEORGE GISSING.** By Gillian Tindall. Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich. $10.00.

**ARNOLD BENNETT: A BIOGRAPHY.** By Margaret Drabble. Alfred A. Knopf. $10.00.

It is the purpose of biography that is not altogether clear when the subject is the life of a writer. To deal with the life of a Henry Ford or a Harold Wilson is to face the singular condition of biography, one already apparent in Plutarch. Autobiography, on the other hand, is metaphorical; it mythicizes the self that is created for the reader. From St. Augustine to Henry Adams, the proper subject of autobiography has been life transformed into metaphor. I suspect that this accounts for why the line between fiction and autobiography, always tenuous, now threatens to disappear entirely. But biography is written from outside its subject. What it offers is not metaphor but example—one is tempted to write *exemplum*.

But the writer as *exemplum*? The confirmation of the writer's self is to be found not in his life but in his books, and the biography of the writer is usually the story of his evolution as an artist. He differs even from his fellow artists in that he deals with words, the stuff of his biographer, too. It is the work that is the proper subject for examination, not the writer. Of course, with writers such as Byron and Hemingway, where the work and the life are so intertwined as to make the one unavailable without the other, the writer becomes a figure in his own right. But the lives of most writers are of interest only to other writers, to people, that is, who practice his craft and aspire to his profession.

The best biographies of writers recreate life as a dramatic sequence out of which the work emerges; but it is ultimately the work in which we are interested. George D. Painter's great work on Proust's life and Leon Edel's monumental study of James's life hold our interest not, certainly, for the quality of the lives they place before us but, rather, because these lives assume purpose only in literature; having read the lives we can read the books. The question that one must ask of the biographer who chooses a

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writer as subject is whether the revelation of the life is going to do very much toward revealing the work.

In the case of Richard B. Sewall, whose *The Life Of Emily Dickinson* has received the National Book Award in biography for last year, the answer would seem to be a reluctant no. It is difficult to understand exactly what Sewall intended to do with this writer whose life is nothing so much as a testimony to the density of her poetry. The weight of art is the sole justification of the life. But how bring into being experiences which are ultimately *only* in the mind's eye? This was Sewall's problem. And no matter how vibrantly the felt experience existed in Emily Dickinson's poetry, one cannot write the life of an individual for whom experience itself is metaphorical. It is almost as if there had existed no breathing creature named Emily Dickinson but, rather, a world she inhabited. One learns a great deal about that world in these two well-documented volumes. Professor Sewall's determination, his unwavering commitment to his subject, is evident from the very first page. But what we are finally left with is a truth of his own choosing: "Certainly no major poet ever lived so private an existence, with no circle, no coterie, almost no sustaining professional gossip." It is the life, not the poetry, that fails him. For the life that is captured in these two volumes is so internalized, so private, that biographical revelation and speculation succeed only in making Emily Dickinson even more unobtainable than she is. Only the most dedicated reader of her poetry is going to be able to struggle through this *Life*. On the one hand, Emily Dickinson lived with an intensity rarely matched in literature; on the other, she cannot really be said to have *lived* at all. And for biography, there has to be a life. It is not merely that Emily Dickinson closed a door on the outside world. Jane Austen can be said to have done that, too. But Jane Austen's life is at least powerfully provincial; Emily Dickinson's life is so internalized as to make the idea of biography at war with itself.

One cannot criticize Professor Sewall's efforts. He has gotten as deep into his subject as any biographer could have done. It could be said that he has created a great work of scholarship. But there is a difference between great scholarship and biography. Professor Sewall knows why Emily's life is elusive, and there is little he can do about that. After reading these two volumes, with their multitude of notes and thorough documentation, the reader is more aware of the biographer's ambition than of his success. Not that Emily Dickinson eludes him. What there is, he captures for his own. But page after page forces the reader to recognize that the life is really beyond biography. "She lives increasingly in her own chosen country, where she was free." It is Emily's determination to hide from view that makes the first volume of this biography so much more interesting than the second.

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And since the first is about her father, brother, sister, sister-in-law, and Mabel Loomis Todd, a woman of lesser genius but perhaps greater interest than Emily, the reader is forced to the conclusion that the life has failed as a subject for biography.

Where Professor Sewall succeeds is in capturing the brutal intensity of nineteenth-century New Englanders. The chapter on Emily's brother, William Austin Dickinson, is a remarkable example of literary explication applied to a non-literary figure. Sewall here simply places the reader within the folds of that intensive New England conscience which produced so much that appalls in American life but which produced the poetry of Emily Dickinson and Robert Lowell, too. William was both his father's ideal and his father's rival as far as Emily was concerned. In his life, far more than in Emily's, one discovers the hard, tangible surface of pre-Civil War New England. Where *The Life of Emily Dickinson* works is in its portrayal of some of the people surrounding Emily, in its analyses of particular poems, in its suggestion that the poems can best be viewed as a battleground between rival camps claiming the poet's allegiance. But the life of the poet escapes.

Joseph Blotner's *Faulkner: A Biography* is another two volume work, a massive 1,846 pages of text followed by another 269 pages of notes and index. The insistent details, the dredging up of every conceivable fact about Faulkner and his family background, the desire to exploit the writer's private life balanced by the equally visible desire to be fair to all concerned—all of this seemed almost repellent as I worked my way through the first volume. But there is something finally appealing about Professor Blotner's insistence on telling whatever there is to tell, so that by the time I had finished his *Faulkner*, I found myself strangely disappointed to have come to the end.

Blotner's *Faulkner* has not received a particularly good critical reception. Given the nature of his subject matter and the length of this biography, this was to be expected. He has picked the bones clean scarcely a generation after Faulkner went to his death. But that is the nature of biography, and to his credit he has performed his task with honesty as well as sympathy. If the biography is too long, if it threatens to reduce its subject's life through the relentlessness of detail piled upon detail, it succeeds in the end in imposing Faulkner's own very human scope upon the reader.

Professor Blotner set out to reconstruct Faulkner's life with a minimum of psychological interpretation and a maximum of fact. He does not explain the man's contradictions, he simply states them, willing to permit the man to rest in his vulnerability (the only place Faulkner permitted his readers to rest). This is an "official" biography, but it does not seek to disguise. Blotner deals with Faulkner's alcoholism, his adolescent need to identify himself as an aviator who had seen combat in the First World War (a need that would, at

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least, be called "adolescent" in anyone but a great writer), his middle-aged affairs with Jean Stein and Joan Williams, his need for shock therapy and psychoanalysis. And through it all the reader is struck by the need for a mask. Is this inherent in the lives of American writers or is it, rather, something that was most prevalent in the famous generation of the twenties? In place of the staid southern moralist for whom violence was a legacy of what we as a people had done to ourselves and the land, we discover a man who, in his strengths as well as in his weaknesses, is very much like us, forced to seek refuge in the appearance of what he pretends to be—reticent writer, heroic aviator, bohemian, Hollywood scriptwriter, hunter, father, husband, lover, fox-hunting squire in Virginia, through it all a man who must write, a teller of stories.

Blotner is not interested in the interior life alone. The presence of the man is powerful, and the biographer refuses the temptation to justify Faulkner's life. It is the work which makes the man a giant. As a man, he sometimes seems an extended cliché. And Blotner is willing to give us that, too. Faulkner's inconsistencies, his attitudinizing, his frequently banal notions about women and politics—all of these are presented as they were. There is no attempt to make his breakdowns and alcoholic retreats into a kind of life's poetry, as I believe Carlos Baker tried to do in his depiction of Hemingway's suicide. Faulkner's tendency toward drama frequently betrayed him in his life, if not in his fiction. Like so many writers who achieve fame, he became self-conscious about his role. The man is far less appealing as a public voice in his later years than he was as the pretense-ridden bohemian known to his fellow Oxfordians as "Count No-Count." But it is the writer whom Blotner makes most alive for us. To see him debt-ridden, conscious of his role as father and husband, working through the Hollywood days on material that was mendacious and trivial, only to return to his room at night to create *Absalom! Absalom!* is to see the price the man was willing to pay to bail out the writer. And because of his desire to give us the writer, Blotner's *Faulkner* is indispensable. One can criticize it as too long; one can object that it does not change our view of Faulkner but rather confirms it. But here we have the man made into the writer, the talent gargantuan, the life not explained but realized.

Of all the writers whose lives have attracted recent biographical studies, Lincoln Steffens has been best served by his biographer despite the fact that he is least in need of a biographer's attentions. Other than his collected *Letters*, the only one of Steffens's books of interest today is *The Autobiography*. Despite Justin Kaplan's attempt to bring him up-to-date, to make him important to us, Steffens seems more, rather than less, distant from our concerns today. Kaplan is the author of the best of all the biographies about the much-biographed Mark Twain, and he manages to get beyond the reader's instinctive skepticism, to demythicize Steffens from the ravages of his own *Auto-*

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*biography* and to claim for him the status of a representative elder statesman (a claim already advanced after Steffens's *Autobiography* made its appearance in 1931), who made his own the desire for revelation that is now a staple of American journalism. But while Kaplan feels a sympathetic trust for his subject, his book did not change this reader's view of Lincoln Steffens.

Of Steffens, it could be said that the man altogether lacked an interior life. He was the product of his imagination seeking out the times, which is why, in his *Autobiography*, he chose to portray himself as an individual whom time had betrayed into political wisdom. But there must have been something more to him, the reader wants to protest. Unfortunately, all there proves to be is the writer who had "a conflicted regard for authority and for figures of authority—Theodore Roosevelt and Tom Johnson were precursors of Stalin in the line of Steffens's allegiances just as much as Mussolini was." It is the weakness of the man that is interesting. Belief disintegrates as he projects his personal whims onto historical process. And this is what is both attractive and annoying about Steffens. He wants to swallow the future. Has there ever been a journalist so frightened of being lost in the famous dust bin of history? "He simply cannot resist the Man on Horseback," wrote one of his critics back in 1934. In the name of belief, he makes ideology useless. He is, as Kaplan suggests, a kind of ancestor of today's New Journalists. A man of generous instincts, he lacked not the capacity to feel but the capacity to think and feel at the same time. He wanted to be a "historical actor," but it was his fate to confuse his needs with the inevitable path of history. A few of those who learned from him, most notably John Reed, were more thoughtful as well as more daring.

Both Margaret Drabble's *Arnold Bennett* and Gillian Tindall's *The Born Exile: George Gissing* are attractive biographies of literary men. Perhaps the novelist, or at least the novelist who can get away from the needs of his own ego, is the ideal biographer. On the level of narrative pleasure, they are not weighed down by scholarly paraphernalia, and they possess a structure that goes beyond chronology. I do not know Gillian Tindall's novels, but after having read her *Gissing* I shall certainly seek them out. As biography, this is a superb little book, although the life it depicts is so painful and depressing as to make one wonder whether art is worth the sacrifice. And there are moments of irritation. Although she wisely begins her book with a brief biographical digest of Gissing's life, she sometimes writes as if she were addressing fellow members of a Gissing Society. In this country, Gissing remains an interesting but minor nineteenth-century English novelist. Other than *New Grub Street* and *Henry Ryecroft*, his work is not really known, not in the sense that the work of Meredith or Wells is known. But he remains what this book calls him, "a writer's writer, more readily appreciated by his own kind than by the

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public at large." No doubt he deserves attention. "With such writers," Virginia Woolf noted, "we establish a personal rather than an artistic relationship. We approach them through their lives as much as through their work."

Gissing's life seems a summation of what was worst in late-Victorian England. He emerges from these pages trapped by circumstance and self, in a manner that has a great deal in common with all the elements of Greek tragedy. The story that Ms. Tindall unfolds is fascinating for the quality of mundane perversity which ruled Gissing's fate. He was a product of a distinctly lower-middle-class milieu, his father a chemist who kept a shop in Wakefield. Even here, he seems the born victim. In a society as class-obsessed as late nineteenth-century England, it is impossible to think that the romantic aspirations that sent him into two disasterous marriages could have withstood life in a different class. Had he been truly working class, he would have had few illusions about prostitutes—not, at least, if he had survived to adulthood. The manner in which he ruined a brilliant scholarly career at its outset when he was caught stealing in Manchester in order to help a local prostitute, Nell Harrison, reflects a romanticism that is strikingly adolescent. Exiled to America, he returned to England and rashly married the girl, one more would-be male savior who was not granted a reprieve until Nell Harrison finally died of drink and syphilis. All through this period, Gissing was creating some of his more ambitious novels; at the same time, he was trying to keep his head above water. Poverty is a threat to anyone, but it must be a particular threat to the aspiring writer whose own class origins are that one step above bottom. It is also a peculiar fascination, for Gissing seems to have been afflicted, much like Orwell is in *Down and Out in Paris and London*, with a built-in receptivity for poverty, as if he had to guarantee it as part of his fate even as he cried out against it.

His experiences with Nell Harrison apparently taught him little, except that he had not yet exhausted his capacity for victimization. If, as Ms. Tindall writes, it "is impossible to separate" sex and class in Gissing's fiction, she shows us that it is equally impossible to separate them in his life. Having stolen for a prostitute, having "disgraced his family and himself by doing something not just against the law but utterly out of keeping with the class with which the whole Gissing household fervently wished to be associated," he now married a woman he had picked up on Oxford Street, the daughter of a stone mason. Edith Underwood was no improvement on Nell Harrison, ending her life in an insane asylum.

For the American reader, Gissing's life is particularly interesting. Like so many other English writers of the nineteenth century, he suffered the stain of class in a way that is difficult for us to understand. Class as categorization has

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never been as fundamental here as it is in England. Whatever the reasons, class fluidity in this country is greater than it is in England. Writers like Gissing feel themselves perpetually in transition; what they fear is falling back into the heap. Gissing's Manchester larceny was not merely a sexual crime, it was a working-class sexual crime. What Gissing had done, at a most crucial period in his life, was to assimilate the vices of a class without managing to assimilate its innate defenses.

The virtues of Gillian Tindall's *The Born Exile* are not merely those of economy and insight. Of all the biographies under discussion here, this is the most traditional. I am not speaking of its technique or structure, but simply about the manner in which the narrative, like the narrative of a good novel, seems inexorable, so tensile with the guilt and victimization of its subject. Caught between worlds, a dying Victorianism and an exploding modernism, Gissing is the child of an inscrutable fate. His art is a triumph, his life a disaster.

Margaret Drabble's *Arnold Bennett* possesses many of the same virtues. Ms. Drabble is also a novelist, and like Gillian Tindall she develops Bennett's life with consummate narrative skill. Like all biographers, she is not without her faults. Her penchant for speculation can grow irritating; she is most reluctant to let anything go. Bennett's "enthusiasm for private bathrooms in hotels" must be the result of his lifelong dyspepsia. But few people, even those who are not dyspeptic, are particularly enthusiastic about sharing bathrooms. And Ms. Drabble does not really serve Bennett well when she tries to defend work she admits is second-rate. Like a lover who turns blemishes into perfections, she feels obliged to salvage everything. Having informed us that the story line of a novel "is ridiculous," she must add, "nevertheless the novel has a considerable charm."

But indulging the writer's penchant for speculation may simply be the price one must pay for biography of any kind. And is it unnatural for the biographer to rate the work higher than the writer's critics? One suspects, however, that Margaret Drabble is fighting a rear-guard action. Bennett was an Edwardian writer who was so prodigious as to virtually set himself apart from criticism. The list of his principal published works, here given in the bibliography, runs to well over one-hundred separate items, almost all of them full-length books or plays. And here we discover one of the problems of literary biography. Bennett today does not seem to be a writer whose value has been unjustly minimized, even if, as Ms. Drabble writes, he was "more honest and lasting than Galsworthy, and more perceptive, in many areas, than Wells." His talent was limited, and while his life was filled with paradox—the shy man who dressed like a dandy, the socialist who relished being "Mr. Bennett of Cadogan Square"—paradox is rarely integrated into his

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novels. His greatest achievement was to make English provincial life a subject for good fiction, but in none of his novels does he endow it with the depth or tension that Lawrence manages.

And yet, the life is interesting, even fascinating. One watches that increasingly rare species, a good writer who is also an honest and industrious man, as he goes about his daily business. Like the young Faulkner, Bennett stood between classes. But his father, a vigorous attractive man who had, by sheer hard work and determination, made himself a soliciter at the age of thirty-four, seems to have been a distinctly healthy influence upon him. (Blotner depicts Faulkner's father as isolated from his sons.) As with Gissing, we are again brought up against that awful English class brutality. Reading these two biographies, one wishes for nothing more than an act of psychological leveling, something that would go beyond even English class-consciousness. Ms. Drabble quotes from Clive Bell's reminiscenses about Bennett in Paris, an example of a particular kind of English snobbery which manages to be both libertarian and vicious, a product of class translated from economics to style. Bennett was always one step away from his childhood potteries. Is it any wonder that he found turn-of-the-century Paris liberating, even if, as Somerset Maugham cattily noted, he was provincial enough not to recognize that "his Empire furniture . . . was certainly not genuine"? The fact that he was satirized by both Pound and Wyndham Lewis speaks well for Bennett as a man of what used to be called "character."

But having noted the genuinely attractive qualities Bennett possessed and how successfully Ms. Drabble presents his life—he *is* an attractive figure—one has to examine the work he left behind. And here, I am afraid, Ms. Drabble's estimate is considerably higher than my own. For her, he remains "one of the most readable and versatile of major novelists." Leaving aside the question of what makes a writer "major," one notes little evolution in Bennett's work. There is something static about his books, just as there is something static about the Edwardian world he inhabited. That he was one of its more attractive inhabitants does not, in itself, make him the important subject Ms. Drabble believes she has got hold of.

Even more than other writers, the biographer of literary figures is subject to shifts in taste. That there has not been a significant shift where Bennett and even Gissing are concerned should not blind us to this fact. Consider Leon Edel's *James*, a work which has taken most of the biographer's literary lifetime. It has suffered some strange vicissitudes of late, and one wonders how many of them are Edel's fault. When the first volume appeared in 1953, James was at the height of critical fashion, his reputation apparently secure in the hands of the New Critics as well as the mood of national conservatism. Both of these combined to make James the preeminent American novelist. By

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the time the final volume appeared in 1972, James was no longer in fashion. The critical reception of a biography is very much a product of its time, whereas the work itself is an attempt to bring what A.O.J. Cockshut calls "truth to life" in his brilliant little study of the art of biography in the nineteenth century. Biography is forced to make up for its lack of aesthetic principles through "the intuition [which] takes the strain of the mass of facts and bears it, accepts it." The biography of a literary figure is made even more complicated, since we expect the life to illuminate the work. That, in fact, remains the chief reason for writing a biography of a literary figure. In creating his books, the writer invents a self, and he spends a good deal of his time trying to justify that choice. The writer's biographer must try to pierce that self at the very same time that he makes us see the work as part of that self. The biographer of the writer is ideally an objective lover—and his task would no doubt be easier if all he had to face were his own blemishes rather than those of his subject.

**LEONARD KRIEGEL**

## THE FIGURE IN THE LETTERS

**THE LETTERS OF HENRY JAMES.** Vol. 1, 1843-1875; vol. 2, 1875-1883. Edited by Leon Edel. Harvard University Press. $15.00 per volume.

It is a constant marvel in these first two volumes of Henry James's letters that so little is said and so much is beautiful. Nowhere is there any explicit revelation of private feeling, James's description of his various locales is casual, his gossip typically concerns the guest list, who sat where, below or above the salt, or who is passing through on his way to Verona or Wiesbaden. When he does deal forth literary and philosophical opinions, they are urbanely restrained. There are exceptions, of course, but for the most part the content of James's letters is relatively insignificant. Yet the letters are beautiful, even when they are about nothing at all, and one reads them carefully, mesmerized by the sinuous grace of the Jamesian sentence. What is beautiful is simply the form of the familiar letter as James shapes it, turning it on the wheel in his study: this to William Dean Howells, this to Grace

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Norton, this to Mrs. Moulton. Here is a letter of introduction sent to Lady Rosebery in which James delicately anticipates Her Ladyship's probable misgivings and then draws her into a backhanded trope so cleverly precious that it would have touched even the black heart of the Red Queen:

> I have just inflicted on you one of those injuries which require an instant apology. I have given a note of introduction to you—and I hasten to notify you of this audacious assault on your liberty and leisure. Perhaps you will forgive me when I tell you that the bearer is a very discreet, intelligent and amiable young man, who will neither bother you, nor bore you, and who is incapable of rash insistence. His name—rather an odd one—is Lawrence Godkin, and he is the son of one of my oldest and best friends, a man of much distinction here, and one of our first—or I should rather say our first—journalists, Edwin Lawrence Godkin, Editor of the *Nation*, New York. The youth goes to Europe for the summer, and when his father asked me the other day for a few introductions for him I bethought myself that I might perhaps appeal to your benevolence. I ought, I know, to minimize the crudity of this appeal by specifying something that you might do for him; but specifying is under the circumstances rather a delicate matter. However, I will risk the suggestion that if you should be spending a Sunday at Mentmore and should have an interstice for a very slender young New Yorker, he would drop into it gratefully and I should be very grateful for him.

Lady Rosebery's response to this graceful petition is assured. Come right in, Larry, and make your slender self at home. To Emma Lazarus, who wished to meet Browning, the welcome is cordial, and the note concludes: "... amuse yourself largely and discreetly and believe me ever, very truly yours, Henry James." These are the hardest letters to write, harder than dark-night-of-the-soul letters to good friends in distant places, because their conventions are rigorously fixed and therefore maddening to divert, to naturalize. James is the master of such letters. And there is undeniably a sweetness in all this genial Victorian formality. If Leon Edel's collection thus fails to shed new light on either James the novelist or James the person, it does nonetheless illuminate the letter itself, this strangest of literary modes.

James wrote his letters sedately settled within an established tradition. From the start, it would seem, he knew precisely the meaning and value of his correspondence in literary terms. Yet if one looks back only a short distance in time, there is Samuel Richardson and a very different notion of the letter. "Who then shall decline the converse of the pen?" Richardson inquires. "The pen that makes distance, presence; and brings back to sweet remembrance all the delights of presence; which makes even presence but body, while absence becomes the soul. . . ." In the eighteenth century the

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familiar letter existed as a volatile discursive mode elaborating itself into different forms. To writers like Richardson and Rousseau the letter was suddenly a privileged way of speaking, a subversion of the generality of classical language. Unlike the letter Cicero and St. Jerome wrote, and then Abelard, *this* letter now had access to the full range of human discourse: colloquial expression, formal rhetoric, any topic, any tone; and it was presumably closed in its circuit, it was heart to heart. In the intimate bosom of its august confidence, one could tell the truth that could not be told in the salon, one could express desire without the fear of an imminent embrace, one could talk about the illicit with composure. Thus the letter overcame in a single bound of words newly formed sets of social and moral barriers between the classes, between the sexes. It spoke out of alienation, it made distance presence, and at length, one suspects, the letter became so cozily aligned with loneliness that separation itself became a value, the occasion and justification for writing letters.

None of these assumptions occur in James's correspondence. His letters are not a refuge from the restrictions of the social world, but rather an extension of that world, another of its functions. The language of even his most spontaneous letters is never innocent. Victorian propriety governs the play of his epistolary style and shields from us the sweating desperate soul Rousseau would have bared. So it is that the large and dramatic decisions that structure James's life in the period 1843-1883 are not openly considered in his letters. For example, in Volume I, the whole flow of his life is toward a single utterance in 1875: "I take possession of the old world—I inhale it—I appropriate it!" But what did this choice signify and how did it articulate itself through James's many-sided reflection? In his early letters home (particularly in those to his parents), James is very careful not to impugn his nationality or make invidious comparisons when describing the richness of his European experience. At times, however, the sense of what he had left behind in America, of what was America in him, poignantly emerges. In the Ducal Palace he sits dreaming before Veronese and Tintoretto: "But I feel as if I might sit there forever (as I sat there a long time this morning) and only feel more and more my inexorable Yankeehood." In Volume I we see clearly enough what attracted James in Europe—the brilliance of its surfaces, the complication of its perspectives, but only rarely do we hear the murmur of James's inexorable Yankeehood. He is guarded in these letters, often opaque, and they are finally disappointing in what the reveal of the young artist whose cold Puritan bones were obviously cooking in warm Italy. The young James is of course eager to demonstrate the good Europe is doing him. He was on a prolonged Grand Tour, and his parents were somewhat reluctantly footing the bill. Thus, Ruskin in hand, James appreciates his cultural heritage in

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elaborate detail. Yet the palaces and galleries constituted only a part of James's education, and we must look beyond these letters to his fiction to learn in what other ways Europe taught him. There, in works like *Roderick Hudson* and *Daisy Miller*, James begins to describe, almost pathologically, the experience of seduction, and here we see the other things he observed and felt in Europe.

Italy seduced him. The Italian letters are ecstatic. He arrived in Rome when it was still a papal state, gorgeous and vile. It was the vivid presence of corruption, one feels, that most struck James in Italy, corruption in the full ambivalent sense of the word. The corruption of oranges, of monks, of an attitude toward experience that was cold and stiff and fearful. His own corruption especially. For his brother William did not much fancy the ripeness of Rome when he briefly joined Henry in Italy, and there is evidence that William worried a little about Henry at the time. Still, a streak of Winterbourne persists in James. "It's the absolute and incredible lack of *culture* that strikes you in common travelling Americans," he complains to his mother in 1870. They are "vulgar, vulgar, vulgar." What did *culture* mean to James at this point in his nascent career? A knowledge of the golden section, an appreciation of the implicit in discourse? Culture is what Lawrence Godkin would bring to Mentmore. He would not bother, nor bore, and never rashly insist. And what did one have to surrender in order to get inside Mentmore? Vulgarity. Long before 1875 James must have decided that somehow he would remain in Europe, that America was a prison he had to escape. The fact that nowhere in these letters does he confide such a scheme thus becomes itself significant, a conspicious silence.

What one longs to find in this collection is that letter to a friend in which the writer says: look, I can't say this to B., but I am just now very troubled, et cetera. Instead the correct son and cheerful brother indefatigibly speaks. "I've gone each morning to the great Uffizi Gallery to commune with the immortals and in the afternoon I have taken a good walk out into the country," he writes in 1869. "I have not yet opened the chapter of churches, having been recently rather over-churched—save to stare with the proper and inevitable feeling at the magnificent many-colored, marble-plated walls and dome of the cathedral." The "proper and inevitable feeling" unfortunately governs a good deal of James's observations in Europe. Even when he mourns the death of Minny Temple, his expression is scrupulous in its piety. Nor do the letters in Volume I give us, as Edel claims, a remarkable vision of Europe moving from its feudal night into its modern night. James seems to have had almost no sense at all of the politics then swirling about him in Italy and France. But then this ugly Europe was not what he had come to see. There are moments, however, when James's gaze focuses sharply. James Russell Lowell,

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settled and stifled and unspeakably mediocre, flits through the letters, the quintessence of Yankeehood. The melancholy Mrs. William Morris stretches out on a settee with a medieval headache while her husband capably and inexhaustibly talks about everything. And there is an admirable portrait of George Eliot, whose plainness is at first startling, amiably discussing lofty themes and slowly becoming beautiful in James's vision.

The letters in Volume I thus carry us safely around James's decision to stay in Europe. In Volume II we are similarly escorted around the question of James's emotional life, whether he was to burn in London or marry or both or neither. Here he is in the first full stride of his maturity, Turgenev's friend, successfully widening his English circle of notable friends, a vivacious and entertaining man, and in his correspondence, for the most part, he is consistently and serenely remote. This, then, is the paradox of James's letters. To enlighten our interpretation of them, we turn to the fiction. If James wrote letters in this period that did confess and reveal his private dreads and secret sorrows, letters that would turn our consideration of his novels, we do not have them. Probably he did not. Richardsonian intensity was no longer the substance of the familiar letter, at least in James's mind. Such letters belonged to the age Jeffrey Aspern inhabited and existed, quite properly, apart from the concerns of literature and the devices of publishing scoundrels. James's letters are instead literary from salutation to signature. In them he lovingly presents a self, the best side of his consciousness as he saw it, writing in a succession of roles: doting son, faithful and tender brother, solicitous friend, magisterial man of letters. And that is, one would like to suppose, something of a small posthumous joke. Here are all these letters, beautifully composed, elegantly turned, and they speak merely to the ephermeral message at hand: "Dearest mother . . . I passed a wretched hour this morning over that part of your letter which mentioned that my drafts of money had been excessive and inconvenient. I am very sorry to learn that father's income has been disturbed, and I shall be very careful to do nothing more to disturb it." Only once, in the celebrated letter to Grace Norton where James speaks eloquently about the "illimitable power" of consciousness, do we see in full the great seriousness of his mind.

As hand into glove, Jamesian reticence fits snugly into Victorian decorum. That is the tale told in these two volumes. If the letter is still for us a release from the writing of treatises and novels, an unrepressed place where the writer, like Rousseau, can indulge his fantasies and his madness, speak to himself *and someone else*, think through his feelings *in medias res*, it was not apparently so for James. His letters are a part of the literary workshop; they are a social responsibility, the very sign of respectable eminence. And in that sense his letters are all variations of that graceful letter to Lady Rosebery,

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letters that do not expose the insufficiency of Victorian society by asserting a violent individuality, but which rather incessantly compliment that society by connecting and connecting its chosen members. This he did patiently and well, increasing and blending the sphere of his correspondence. To his family and friends James offered, then, not only a wealth of introductions, but as well the reflected harmony of his well-balanced sentences, the copious wealth of his easy wit, his temperate manner. The self and the world so described is in fact an idealized picture of Victorian life: a dance of comprehended functions in slow time. Everyone was no doubt pleased to get a letter signed, very truly yours, Henry James.

**NEIL SCHMITZ**

## THE LIVES OF THE POETS

**THREE ON THE TOWER: THE LIVES AND WORKS OF EZRA POUND, T.S. ELIOT, AND WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS. By Louis Simpson. William Morrow and Company. $12.50.**

Louis Simpson has found in one of William James's essays in *Pragmatism* the title of his new book. "Our spirit," James reports, "shut within this courtyard of sense-experience, is always saying to the intellect upon the tower: 'Watchman, tell us of the night, if it aught of promise bear.' " I assume the title is ironic: Simpson's chosen watchmen are not embodiments of the intellect in his account of them, and they have little to report; they cannot recite "the story of the night." It is not clear who has appointed them to their posts or what qualifications they have produced for employment. *Three on the Tower* is biocriticism rather than criticism; it deals with the lives and works of Pound, Eliot, and Williams on the assumption that the relation between a life and a work is simple: the life issues in the work, the work is adequately explained by the life. Yeats thought that the human intellect was forced to choose between two perfections—perfection of the life and perfection of the work—and he found the choice appalling. He wanted both/and, and had to settle for either/or. Eliot thought that it was necessary to distinguish between the man who suffered and the

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mind that created. I have heard it maintained that the distinction is necessary only as a critical strategy and that at the deepest level the distinction vanishes; it is the same man who both suffers and creates. Or rather: when we are engaged with the greatest works of art, responding to them with that feeling of exacted surrender which characterizes the experience, we are never aware of the distinction between man and artist. I do in part believe the argument, but I hold to the distinction because it discourages me from thinking that a work is fully explained by the circumstances of its origin. It also reminds me that the imagination intervenes between life and work and that it is still a mysterious business. Simpson is not troubled by these scruples; he thinks that poems are sufficiently clarified by reference to people, jobs, money, friends, influences at large.

I would meet him upon this honestly. He thinks that Williams's story of the night would be an account of the women he brought to bed, and that the poetry would be illuminated if we knew more of those encounters. I think the poetry would still be waiting for us, keeping its secrets, when morning came. Simpson has enough faith in his biocritical method to divide his book into three sections: "Ezra Pound, or Art" (88 pages), "T.S. Eliot, or Religion" (100 pages), and "William Carlos Williams, or Experience" (123 pages). The game is rigged, the terms are incommensurate. It is fair enough to say that art is crucial to Pound and religion to Eliot, but not if you assign experience to Williams; the dice are grossly loaded in Williams's favor. It would be fairer to call Williams's supreme value sex or even contact, if you insist on dishing out these fractured terms. Williams gets top billing in Simpson's book for reasons that have nothing to do with the work and nearly everything to do with the life. I never met Williams, though we corresponded a bit during his last years, and I cherish the fifteen or twenty letters he wrote me. I have no doubt that he was a fascinating man, a far more forthcoming person than Eliot and far more tolerable than Pound. But I cannot be persuaded that he was what Eliot indisputably was, a major poet, or what Pound disputably was, an extraordinarily gifted poet if not in the class of Eliot or Yeats. Williams comes out well in Simpson's account, but for unconvincing reasons. The story of his days is lively: the early years with H.D., Pound, Charlie Demuth, Zukofsky, the history of objectivism, Williams's one-sided vendetta against Eliot, the works and days in Rutherford, New Jersey, writing, loving, doctoring, his marriage, illness, courage. Most of this is well told in Williams's *Autobiography* and *The Build-Up*, so Simpson has plenty of evidence—good narrative stuff. Besides, he can offer a plausible version of Williams's popularity in terms of "sincerity." If Williams can be credited with the invention of "an American measure," all the better. But the most powerful reason for Williams's primacy in this book

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is the mediocre lives attributed to Pound and Eliot. Simpson is grudging in his account of Pound; he doesn't think much of the poetry, puts down *Mauberley*, gives an inert account of the *Cantos*, and thinks the only redeeming motive in Pound is his love of art, "the true Penelope to whom E.P. is returning." Pound's life is glossed as a dreary narrative of wrongheadedness and vanity. I happened to be reading *Three on the Tower* when Donald Davie's new book on Pound reached me, and a few days later I got Catherine Seelye's *Charles Olson and Ezra Pound.* Olson on Pound is extraordinarily warm, impassioned, and tender. And Davie's little book shows that it is possible to write about Pound, after all, while holding "reality and justice in a single thought." Simpson's brief life of Pound is unresponsive, and it is bound to encourage others to lapse into the conclusion ("and thank God that's over," I hear them say) that they may safely give Pound the cup of his deserving: indifference.

The chapter on Eliot is a mixture, good and bad. There is a good comment on Eliot's criticism, that "in reading Eliot's criticism of men who have been dead these hundreds of years, one feels that one is witnessing a drama the ending of which is still uncertain." I feel that is true when Eliot is discriminating between the sermons of Andrewes and of Donne, or between the relative merits of two languages, English and Italian. Simpson has also some excellent observations about Eliot's early poems, and he quotes Jung most tellingly at one point. But he perpetuates the old notion of Eliot's time-serving prudence, his clerical cut, and incites the reader to exclaim: "How could anything noble and true come from such a shoddy fellow?" Again Simpson doesn't respond very much to Eliot's major poems; *Four Quartets* doesn't mean much to him; he could even live without "Marina," I gather. *The Waste Land* is alive to him, and he is alive to it. But generally his sense of Eliot is sluggish if not hostile. He says that "Eliot was not a Fascist, though he has been called one," but in the next paragraph he disposes of an episode in Eliot's political life by reporting that "in 1928, commenting in *The Criterion*, Eliot said that the statement of policy by *The British Lion*, the organ of the British Fascists, was 'wholly admirable.' " I protest. Here is precisely what Eliot said:

> We have received three periodicals, all of quite different inspiration from *The Criterion* and from each other, each of which provokes a word of comment or enquiry.
>
> The first is called *The British Lion*, and is the organ of the British Fascists. A very angry lion on the cover is demolishing the symbols of the present Russian government, and is supported by a couple of fasces. Our copy is accompanied by two pamphlets setting forth the aims of the British Fascists. The accusations made by *The British Lion* against British

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> Communists may all be true, and the aims set forth in the statement of policy are wholly admirable. The *Lion* wishes to support 'His Majesty the King, his heirs and Religion.' These are cardinal points. We would only suggest that the British Lion might very well uphold these things without dressing itself up in an Italian collar. It is not our business to criticize fascism, as an Italian regime for Italians, a product of the Italian mind. But is *The British Lion* prepared to accept *le fascisme intégral?* What of the fascist ideas of political representation, which may be excellent, but which hardly square with 'the present Constitution' which the *Lion* is sworn to defend? It seems unfortunate that a nationalist organization should have had to go abroad for its name and its symbol.

This comes in *The Criterion*, February 1928, Vol. VII, No. ii, pp. 97-98. Eliot is twisting that lion's tale, not feeding the beast or extracting thorns from its foot. I have quoted the whole passage and made a fuss about Simpson's sentence because many readers are likely to take his word for the situation without going to the source, and the effect is bound to be misleading. What Eliot thought of fascism is a long story, and it has been well told now by William Chase, but the gist is that Eliot thought it an Italian invention for Italians, deplorable when exported to countries with entirely different histories and traditions; intellectually, fascism was rubbish; "humbug" was Eliot's word for it. To revert to Simpson's Eliot: it ends, I am sorry to report, with a nauseating page in which Simpson ascribes to Eliot on a Caribbean beach a *monologue intérieur* about clouds, shadows, and Valerie splashing about in the water.

There is no Caribbean stuff in the chapter on Williams. But none of these men, according to the rhetoric of Simpson's book, should be hired to look out from a watchtower. They were all, in different degrees, silly like us; generously foolish and naive about art, priggishly foolish about religion, pretty slaphappy about experience. Simpson is himself a celebrated poet, and therefore he may not find the ways of imagination as strange as I do. He and I would agree that there is some relation between *The Waste Land* and Eliot's unhappy marriage. Our difference is that he thinks you can make a safe biocritical leap from the marriage to the poem and that the more you know about the marriage the safer the leap becomes; while I think that the gap between the marriage and the poem is always absolute, and that by definition it stays absolute no matter how much you learn about the marriage. Simpson is on more intimate terms with the imagination than I am, but the danger of that intimacy is that he reduces the poem to the marriage, as if the imagination merely took dictation from the facts of the case.

This has become a more quarrelsome review than I had anticipated. A last word: Simpson encourages the reader to think that these three watchmen were pretty ordinary fellows. I think they were extraordinary cases of the ordinary, and most extraordinary in one respect: their poetic imaginations.

**DENIS DONOGHUE**

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# THE CULTURE INDUSTRY

**THE INVENTION OF CULTURE.** By Roy Wagner. Prentice-Hall. $8.95.

Like everything else these days, anthropology is in a crisis. Since the turbulence of the sixties, anthropologists have been looking at their discipline with increasing self-criticism and, I should add, with all the narcissistic delight of specular contemplation. Their delight, to be sure, was nurtured by spiraling enrollments, easy fieldwork money, easy junket money, much publicity, and the possibility, amidst such scandals as Project Camelot, of a true cause: the Amerindians, South American ethnocide, Vietnam, and so forth. Some anthropologists took wildly iconoclastic positions—always fascinating to the public. Dell Hymes opened his recent anthology *Reinventing Anthropology* with these two questions: "If anthropology did not exist, would it have to be invented? If it were reinvented, would it be the anthropology we have now?" He answers both questions—they are, of course, "anthropologically" absurd and philosophically inconsistent—in the negative, one suspects, *pour épater la bourgeoisie anthropologique*. The brouhaha that *Reinventing Anthropology* inspired—and it did inspire a brouhaha, however contrived—was hardly merited by its *scandaleux* or by the excellence of its contributions. Its title was a jibe, one supposes, at *Rethinking Anthropology* by Edmund Leach, the anthropology doyen of *The New York Review*. Other anthropologists succumbed to the easy sloganism of a vulgar Marxism; and still others, Bob Scholte is perhaps the most notable, adopted the self-critical stance of the *Frankfurtschule*, the dialectical *raison* of Sartre, the methodological probings of phenomenology and the new hermeneutics, and the reasoned imbroglios of structuralist and post-structuralist thought. The majority, of course, bracketed off the problematic of their discipline and continued stalwartly in the "empirically-based," "scientifically objective," essentially "materialist" tradition that has constituted the American anthropological tradition.

Roy Wagner, whose third book *Inventing Culture* has just appeared, falls outside all of these categories. He is perhaps most strongly influenced by the so-called symbolic anthropology of David Schneider, Clifford Geertz, and Victor Turner. Wagner is a dedicated anthropologist, a compulsive writer—he himself admits this—a superb fieldworker, a clumsy writer—he would probably admit this too—and a theoretical loner. His first two books, *The Curse of Souw* and *Habu*, are first-rate ethnographies of the Daribi people of Papua-New Guinea with whom Wagner spent two years. Indeed they vie in their understanding with, say, Maurice Leenhardt's *Do Kamo*.

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*Inventing Culture* is an altogether different kind of book. It is a theoretical work. It treats American culture as much as it treats the Daribi. It too raises the question of anthropology and, with virtually no reference to any other work, attempts an answer that is both radically committed to cultural relativity and to human creativity and inventiveness. Wagner argues that culture, as the term is used by anthropologists, who are at the same time influenced by the traditional usage of the word, is an invention of the anthropologist, his response to the confrontation with otherness. It provides him with a relativistic basis for understanding other people. Culture becomes, if I understand Wagner correctly, and he is not always easy to understand, the reification of the anthropologist's attempt to make sense out of the experience of fieldwork, to give meaning to what is at one level a unique experience even in this world of intercultural mobility. At another level, and here Wagner's insistence is important, it is no different than any human being's attempt to make sense of his situation. We are all anthropologists, Wagner says. Anthropology itself, however, is the Westerner's unique response to certain situations; it is by no means a universal response. Wagner suggests, for example, that such messianic movements as the cargo cults of Melanesia are a sort of reverse anthropology. They metaphorize the same intersocietal relations. "Culture" and the Melanesian "kago" are "to some extent 'mirror images' of each other in the sense that we look at the natives' cargo, their techniques and artifacts, and call it 'culture,' whereas they look at our culture and call it 'cargo.' " Of course they mean by cargo far more than simply manufactured objects. "It's significance is based rather on the symbolic use of European wealth to represent the redemption of native society." One wonders what the significance of culture is for the Westerner.

Wagner's point, however spurious and contrived it may seem to his colleagues, has considerable rhetorical force, for it suggests what another invention of anthropology might look like. Such a suggestion is of considerable importance in a discipline that has exhibited extraordinary resistence to the use of non-Western modes of analysis in its enterprise and has succumbed so readily to the crudest reductionism (as in much of the writings in Culture and Personality and Ecological Anthropology).

Having postulated culture as the anthropologist's invention, and the layman's invention, Wagner goes on to explore the meaning of invention and innovation. Here he becomes miserably entangled in his theory, which is essentially a mix of structural-linguistic, contextual, dialectical, metaphorical and metaphorizing theories of meaning. Put much too simply, Wagner argues that invention and convention, in any act of meaning-production, are always in a dialectical relationship, that meaning results from two complementary modes of articulation that mask each other, at least as far as the

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actor's intentions are concerned. One of these, apparently characteristic of American society, is the collectivizing in which the particular is subsumed by the conventional. And the other, apparently characteristic of at least certain tribal and peasant societies, is the differentiating in which the conventional is subsumed by the particular. Wagner calls the context that prevails the control; its primacy is of course both necessary and illusory.

Wagner illustrates the dialectical interplay between convention and invention, controlling context and implicit context, collectivizing mode and differentiating mode, through a series of often insightful, occasionally banal, analyses of such *constructs*—I don't know what other word to use—as American advertising, Daribi magic, the self, the personality, and the soul, and of course nature, culture, and society. To take one example, and probably not the best: Wagner argues that the whole productive technique and literature, the "knowledge" of American technological and scientific culture "is a set of devices for the invention of a natural and phenomenal world"; that by accepting the conventional belief that the measuring, predicting, and harnessing of a world of "natural" forces is artificial, part of the domain of human manipulation and inherited tradition, "we precipitate the phenomenal world as part of the innate and inevitable."

> The significant aspect of this invention, its *conventional* aspect, is that its product must be taken *very seriously*, so that it is no invention at all, but *reality*. If the inventor keeps this seriousness firmly in mind . . . while doing his job of measuring, predicting, or harnessing then the resulting experience of "nature" will sustain his conventional distinctions.

Wagner adds, interestingly, that "our technological culture must 'fail' if it is to succeed, for its very failures constitute the thing that it is trying to measure, harness, or predict."

> Science and technology "produce" our cultural distinctions between the innate and the artificial to the extent that they fail to be completely exact or efficient, precipitating an image of "the unknown" and of uncontrolled natural force.

It is not surprising that at the beginning of his book, he draws a parallel between his theory and the philosophies of Buddhism and the Muta'zilla of Islam.

Wagner's vision is extreme; his theory is confused. He lacks philosophical sophistication. He lacks, too, the irony to occasionally mock his own edifice. His work is courageous though. Unlike other anthropologists he has tried

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to push to the limit the position of relativism and the philosophical implications of a rigorous study of culture as a symbolic system. For this he deserves credit and merits reading (though he will be undoubtedly ignored by a lot of anthropologists). His commitment to human inventiveness and to "the spontaneous and creative realization of human culture" is exceptional. But, in his commitment to inventiveness, he has fallen victim to precisely the sloganism of his own culture. A dynamic word does not necessarily make for a dynamic theory. To replace culture by invention, interpretation, understanding, and meaning by innovation, may nudge the reader to regard man as dynamic, creative, innovative, and inventive, but it does not provide a theory which accounts for these essential features of mankind.

To the sophisticated reader, Wagner's argument will appear naive, clumsy, *déjà entendu*, and frustrating—very frustrating for he is clearly onto something. His book is above all a struggle between that humanistic vision of man as a creative being that motivates so many anthropologists and the cognitive and moral violence that is implicit within the anthropological enterprise itself. Wagner's solution—a sincere sort of compromise between theoretical obfuscation and sloganistic humanism—must be seen, I suppose, as a profound symptom of the confrontation of which he himself writes.

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## WRITERS' CHOICE

GILBERT SORRENTINO: In 1967, Grove Press published Aidan Higgins's first novel, *Langrishe, Go Down*, a brilliantly conceived and written story of a love affair between an Irish woman past her bloom and a young, arrogant, and egocentric German student living in Ireland in the days just before the onset of the Second World War. It is a model of prose style and exactly sets the figure of the desperately loving and coldly treated Imogen Langrishe against the collapsing political situation in Europe. The slow slide into misery and despair of Imogen and her two aging sisters is bound up with Imogen's doomed love and the mood of the times with impeccable artistry. In 1972, Seymour Lawrence/Delacorte brought out Mr. Higgins's second novel, *Balcony of Europe*, another love story, this one set in Spain in the early sixties amid a milieu of expatriate artists "living cheap." As with his first novel, *Balcony of Europe* is meticulously and poetically composed. It is more ambitious and equally successful. The basic human problems of his two books are not only thoroughly investigated in their own terms, but work almost as elaborate epiphanies to reveal the decaying social fabric of the times in which they occur. Mr. Higgins is the McCoy.

ROBERT COLES: *The Tenth Muse: The Psyche of the American Past*, by Albert Gelpi (Harvard University Press). An ambitious and provocative effort to show how America's social and economic struggles have affected the sensibilities of some of its leading 19th century poets—Emerson, Poe, Whitman, Dickinson.

*Pueblo: Mountain, Village, Dance*, by Vincent Scully (Viking). A sensitive and richly documented portrayal of a particular Indian tribe's continuing attempt to make do in the face of the threatening, rewarding, and arguably, devouring Anglo presence.

STEVEN SIMMONS: Despite the spate of books and articles written about Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas in the past few years—or perhaps because of these accounts—Stein is still looked at more as a "literary figure" than as a writer. Few people, for example, seem to have heard of, much less read, *Mrs. Reynolds*, Stein's last full-scale novel. Even devoted critics of Stein haven't examined the book in depth, which is difficult to understand; for *Mrs. Reynolds* is one of Stein's three or four most beautiful works, and also—formally and thematically—an important sum-

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mation of her entire oeuvre. A study of ordinary people encountering the extraordinary event of wartime, *Mrs. Reynolds* unites the narrative force of the autobiographies, the eccentric, dreamlike landscapes of the lyrical works, and the tough-minded humanism of *Three Lives* and *The Making of Americans*. Stein wrote *Mrs. Reynolds* during World War II in occupied France, and Yale University Press published it in 1952. I hope that someone will soon bring out a new, more readily available edition.


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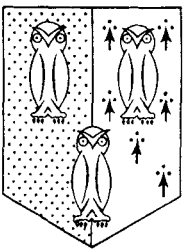

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## LETTERS

### Systems Analysis

**PR:**

I would like to comment on Frank Kermode's recent essay in *PR* "Hawthorne's Modernity" because the brilliance of Professor Kermode's analysis of Hawthorne's novels in that essay clarifies how mistaken is his theoretical point. He illustrates Hawthorne's complex awareness of the hermeneutic problems involved in constructing a univocal moral allegory in order to demonstrate the more general claim that, since "the old contracts between the signifier and the signified, between the authoritative maker and the reader certain that there is a right interpretation, are badly broken" in modern writing, "we must interpret the book according to the order and disorder of our own imaginations."

It is ironic that the one statement of Hawthorne's Kermode takes as unequivocally authoritative is his formulaic insistence that "the reader may choose among these theories" for interpreting an action. Hawthorne could not have written his tales had he taken his own advice, for their power lies not in eliciting single interpretations but in rendering the complex questions any self-respecting interpreter must take into account if he is to understand a dramatic situation. Indeed we can be grateful that Professor Kermode does not really take Hawthorne's advice either. His essay does not gain its power as a subjective attempt to propose an interpretation of a story; it describes complex patterns and self-conscious historical dimensions in texts and allows the texts to take on their full meaning through the interplay of these patterns. He does not propose a meaning, but like most good critics points out objective dimensions of the text not noticed by other readers and necessary to its full realization.

Let me suggest two abstract problems in Professor Kermode's theory. First he simplifies the action of a literary text. Texts often complement the dramatic actions narrated by foregrounding as part of their objective texture the implicit author's attempt to come to terms with the problems involved in determining their meanings. To take an extreme example, very few of us would feel that someone proposing a single thematic reading of a Kafka novel had read the novel very well. Second, his theory allows no middle ground between single objective interpretations and subjective recreations of a text. It ignores the fact that what matters in a good literary text is not the meaning it proposes for experience but the quality and consistency of the questions it leads the reader to entertain about the possible ways of constructing significance for a dramatized action. Like many modern critics, Kermode falls into the trap of taking seriously as literary dilemmas the problems in

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theology which first gave birth to hermeneutics as a quasi science. In theology it is true that the alternatives are a proper single vision of God's intended meaning or subjective realism—be it in inner light theology or in the secular liberalism that followed upon the death of God. Literature's role, however, is not to provide answers about the meaning of experiences but to focus questions and to make us aware of complexities in experience which any single explanatory system must take into account.

Professor Kermode assumes that the oppositions true or false, objective or relative, apply to literary interpretations, but aesthetics differ from theology and most philosophy by inviting instead interpretive models to be assessed in terms of more or less insight, perspicuity, and coherence. Literary texts invite descriptions not summary statements—subjective or objective: and what cultural value they have depends on our shared ability to recognize the significance of those descriptions.

**Charles Altieri**
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(Descriptions of books are furnished by the publishers)

**LENIN IN ZURICH, by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Translated by H.T. Willetts. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $8.95**

*Lenin In Zurich* chronicles Lenin's frustrating exile in Switzerland, from his arrest in Cracow and subsequent flight to Zurich at the outbreak of World War I, to his departure for Russia in 1917. Solzhenitsyn examines the private man as well as the familiar public figure, concentrating on facets of Lenin's personality and behavior that have been glossed over in most other accounts. Solzhenitsyn has set himself the task of establishing the truth of Russia's early revolutionary years and of probing the character of the man who had such an indelible impact on his country's fate.

**BEGINNINGS, by Edward Said. Basic Books, $15.95**

The quest for an understanding of what it means to "begin" takes Edward Said through the masterworks of Western literature, to the cyclical philosophy of Vico (whose thought has never before been so tellingly linked to contemporary consciousness) and on to what is certainly the most brilliant explication of postwar French criticism and philosophy yet written, offering illuminating explications of Levi-Strauss's structuralism, Foucault's archeology, and Derrida's philosophy of writing.

**STRUCTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY, VOLUME II, by Claude Levi-Strauss, translated by Monique Layton. Basic Books, $17.50**

In this long-awaited Volume II of his *Structural Anthropology* Levi-Strauss focuses on such important topics as: comparative religion as it relates to nonliterate peoples; how myths die; structuralism and literary criticism; urban civilization and mental health; the founders of modern cultural study such as Rousseau and Durkheim; and his own reflections on kinship; the future of art; and race in history.

**SCHOOLING IN CAPITALIST AMERICA, by Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis. Basic Books, $13.95**

The authors (two of the nation's most respected radical economists) hold in this book that our educational system has not in the past, and does not now, provide equality of opportunity for human development. The present function of the schools is not to reform society but to reinforce it by producing the inequities which sustain it. Equality of opportunity will never be offered by our educational institutions, the authors assert, unless the inherently unequal structure of the capitalist economy of which it is an integral part, is abandoned.

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**NOTES FOR THE TWO-DOLLAR WINDOW: Portraits from an American Neighborhood, by Leonard Kriegel. Saturday Review Press, $8.95**

An autobiographical memoir of a white working-class neighborhood in the Bronx from the thirties to the present, as seen through the lives of the Irish, the Italians, and the Jews living there. It is about change, about wanting and hurting and joking, and, always, about trying to get ahead: the luck of the two-dollar window at the race track; the chance to outmaneuver the system. "In his new book Kriegel has emerged as 'the Fred Exley of the Bronx' and more." —DAN WAKEFIELD

**POETRY AND REPRESSION, by Harold Bloom. Yale University Press, $11.95**

This reinterpretation of the full sweep of English and American romantic poetry expands Bloom's recent theoretical speculations. Emphasizing practical criticism, the book offers close readings of poems of Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, Browning, Whitman, Yeats, and Stevens. *Poetry and Repression* contributes importantly to ideas about literary history, working out a dialectic of the way poetic tradition emerges from the processes of revisionism and canon-formation.

**ULYSSES: A Facsimile of the Manuscript, by James Joyce, introduction by Harry Levin, bibliographical preface by Clive Driver. Octagon, $150.00**

The 810 pages of handwritten manuscript of Joyce's Ulysses are here reproduced in two volumes by quality photo-offset lithography. The facsimile is accompanied by a third volume that reproduces a copy of the first edition marked with the differences between this text, the manuscript, and the *Little Review* installments, changes in form and conception which uniquely demonstrate Joyce's working method. The manuscript also brings to light the many typographical errors in all printed editions, as well as many lines overlooked in its initial transcription. The student and scholar are thus provided for the first time with the means for establishing a definitive text. The three volumes, stoutly boxed, are issued in a numbered edition limited to 1,775 copies.

**THE CULTURAL CONTRADICTIONS OF CAPITALISM, by Daniel Bell. Basic Books, $12.95**

In this book, which concentrates on our current cultural predicament, Daniel Bell carries forward the discussion of his earlier major work, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*. Together, the two volumes constitute one of the most original and important works of social criticism in our time.

**IN A SHALLOW GRAVE, by James Purdy. Arbor House, $7.50**

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**R.D. LAING: The Man and His Ideas, by Richard I. Evans. Dutton, $12.95**

R.D. Laing is one of the most influential and controversial figures in psychotherapy today. This book contains an interview with Laing by Evans covering a wide variety of subjects, as well as a biographical essay by Peter Mezan, and a hitherto unpublished essay by Laing himself on schizophrenia.

**ESCAPE FROM EVIL, by Ernest Becker. Free Press, $9.95**

Ernest Becker's final work, *Escape From Evil*, elaborates on the central theme of his Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Denial of Death*: the shaping force behind human activity—including evil—is the attempt to deny human mortality and insignificance. In this book he fully confronts, for the first time, the fact of evil, and its meaning for man's destiny. "Absolutely essential to the understanding of our troubled times." —ANAIS NIN

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In addition to fifty-six edited interviews, each prefaced with an introduction by Mrs. Perlis, the book includes over eighty illustrations, many of them reproduced here for the first time—unique photographs of Ives and his family and associates, original music manuscripts, rare programs of performances of Ives's works, and handwritten letters both to and from Ives. These combine to form an in-depth picture of one of the most original and creative minds of the twentieth century.

**AFFIRMATIVE DISCRIMINATION: Ethnic Inequality and Public Policy, by Nathan Glazer. Basic Books, $10.95**

One of the most controversial social developments of recent years is "Affirmative Action," the government's policy of requiring educators and employers (from both governmental and private sectors) to actively favor members of discriminated-against groups in decisions on admissions, hiring, and promotions. In this important book, Nathan Glazer, the distinguished Harvard sociologist who co-authored *The Lonely Crowd* and *Beyond the Melting Pot*, questions the wisdom—and indeed the equity of the new policy.

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**ORWELL AND THE LEFT, by Alex Zwerdling. Yale University Press, $11.50**

Alex Zwerdling uses Orwell's deep commitment to a political philosophy as a starting point in assessing Orwell's life and career. He shows that Orwell in his mature work tried to reform the Left from within and to find a socialist faith rooted in his own experience and observation rather than in ideology.

**PITY THE MONSTERS: The Political Vision of Robert Lowell, by Alan Williamson. Yale University Press, $11.50**

While essentially a thematic study, this book can also be read as a commentary or guide to much of Robert Lowell's poetry. Williamson works close to the text and offers detailed readings of the major poems.

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The life and ideas of Patrick Geddes the Victorian polymath, city planner, and a true English eccentric. "Kitchen's book is more than a biography of a founding father of sociology and town planning. It is about the Victorian thirst for knowledge and the excellent belief that the true amateur of many subjects was better than the specialist of one, and that to learn was to improve." "A romantic biography full of fascination." —*Times* of London.

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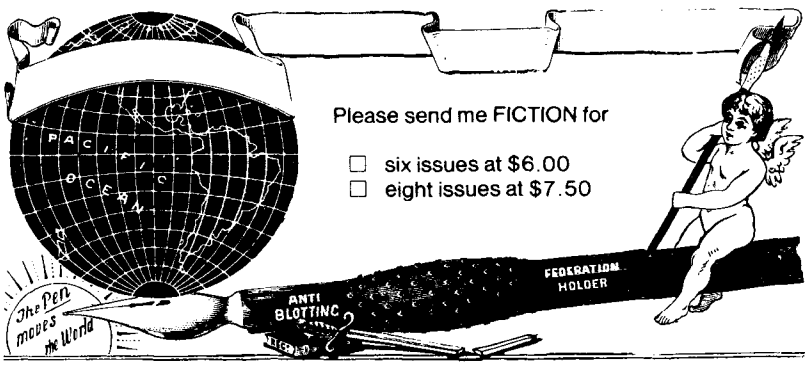


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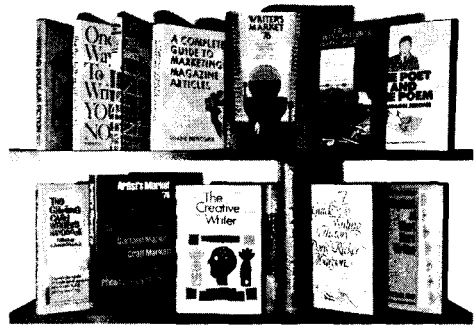


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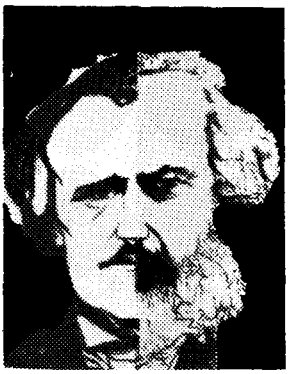

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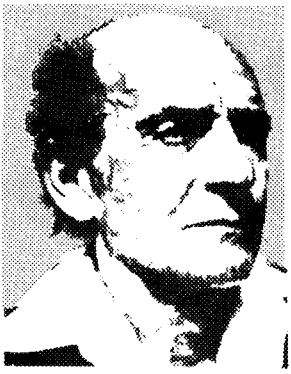

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